In for a penny, in for a pound

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by XCuteAsHale

Summary

"The mission is simple, we need someone to go undercover and get into Lecter's crew. We need you to find an in and work yourself up the ladder. We've received information that there's a war coming in between Lecter and the Bratva, and I don't think I have to tell you that if that happens there's no containing all the casualties that will be the result, do I?"

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When special agent Jack Crawford says jump, all Will Graham can do is ask how high. When he says "go infiltrate the Lithuanian mob without proper mission perimeter, or a proper way into the family", well, all Will Graham can do is try and keep his head above water.

Notes

To my most beloved Minsin.
A late birthday gift, not completely finished, but still good. I hope.
Masse masse glad i deg.

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

Will prided himself in being able to pick up the mood of the room within a tenth of a millisecond of entering it, prided himself in being the best profiler the FBI had seen in decades, prided himself in never getting caught unaware by a turn of someone's mood - so really, he should have seen this coming. He should have seen the way Special Agent Jack Crawford's brows drew together, the way he had dark bags underneath his eyes attesting to his lack of sleep - and thus overconsumption of caffeine - and the way his body tensed. He should have seen it coming in the way the senior agent, his commanding officer, turned slowly towards him as if giving Will ample time to rethink his words. Special Agent William Graham should have noticed. The fact that he didn't he blamed on the mission file currently lying on the table in front of him.

"What. Did. You. Say." Jack Crawford bit out.

"I said no, I'm not doing it, Jack," Will looked up then, eyes stopping at Jack's cheekbone, "I'm not signing up for a suicide mission."

It appeared that the temperature in the room had dropped by fifteen degrees since he sat down in a uncomfortably deep office chair, since the file labeled "Sensitive information - Need to know only" had been placed in front of him, since he'd been informed of the newest mission Jack wanted to send him into head first. When he opened the file he was greeted by a picture of Mr. Hannibal Lecter, age 45, Lithuanian origins, suspected and semi-confirmed leader of the Brolybė - the Lithuanian mob.

There was no doubt in his mind what Crawford wanted to ask, what he wanted to assign Will to, what he would *demand* . It wasn't a secret that Jack Crawford had a special hatred towards Hannibal Lecter, and despite no one being certain where the hatred found it's motivation besides the usual wish to bring criminals to justice, everyone who joined the FBI would at some point learn about it. Will had learned it during his first mission.

He'd been barely 18 at the time, and his youthful looks had been the deciding factor that he should be the one to for once play the prostitute, and not the John, during what should have been a routine mission. Or, during what he was told was a routine mission. He hadn't been told until after the mission had been handled that they were looking for a particular John with a particular interest in young boys at the ends of their ropes, that they had chosen Will in the hopes that they could lure the man out. When he'd brought it up to Jack, shaking with rage

and hurt, the older man had looked at him with cold eyes, had told him that he should never take someone else's information for granted, always double check, always do his own search. Jack had yelled, had talked about how Will should be happy that he had someone to look out for him, that he should be glad that he hadn't been brought to go undercover for Lecter's crew - because God only knew that there was no saving you then.

Will had remembered that time, that conversation, and he knew without doubt that Jack did too. And yet. And yet here they sat, with surveillance photos with questionable quality of Lecter catching on Will's peripheral vision, and Jack wanted to send him in.

"I'm not quite sure I heard you right," Jack said, body unnaturally still, "Because it sounded for a second there like you wanted to go against a direct order."

"Jack, you know as well as I do that no one has ever gotten alive out from under Lecter's nose, hell, no one has even been able to get close enough for it to matter anyway!" Will knew he sounded hysterical, could see the way the senior agent took in his body language, but he couldn't stop himself.

"Jack, if I may," Special agent Beverly Katz intoned, "Graham is still a *kid* , he's not experienced enough to handle being undercover for that long, let alone at that degree."

Will had forgotten that she was even in the room, to focused on Crawford, on the file in front of him, too lost in the memories of a case long ago.

"I'm not a kid." Will grumbled.

The two senior agents ignored him.

"If you could both *shut the hell up and sit down* ," Jack's voice rose on the last words, his body slowly raising from his chair, the vein in his forehead throbbing dangerously, "and let me lay out this god damn mission before you start shooting it down."

He stared them both down, and Will tried (and failed) not to cower beneath the stare, and only when they both nodded did Crawford sit back down, fold his hands in front of him and look at Will with a tired sigh.

"The mission is simple, we need someone to go undercover and get into Lecter's crew. We need you to find an in and work yourself up the ladder. We've received information that there's a war coming in between Lecter and the Bratva, and I don't think I have to tell you that if that happens there's no containing all the casualties that will be the result, do I?" Jack didn't give any of them a chance to answer, "The mission will entail you being completely undercover, Will. There will be no contact between you or your handler, whom will be me, unless you have a feeling that anyone is on to you. We'll set you up in a new apartment and erase all traces of you with the FBI, we'll set up a small saving account for you and we'll give you a new identity, but you will be completely on your own."

Will stared at his mentor, the man who had taken him underneath his wing when Will was nothing more than a loudmouthed 18 year old, just out of the academy and cocky to a fault. He knew he should say no, that he should refuse, that he should leave his badge on the table if it came to that. This *was* stupid, it *was* a suicide mission, and they all knew it - they all knew that Jack was throwing Will to the wolves. He knew he should say no, but in the end, there wasn't really a question when it came down to it.

"I'll do it. On one condition," Will said, ignoring the way Agent Katz' eyes bulged and Jack's pleased smile, "I want to keep my name, my real name, because we all know that there is no more after this. Even if I should by some miracle survived not only being undercover within the Brolybė *and* testifying at the trial, there wouldn't be any way for me to continue my work with the FBI. I want to keep my name, because if I survive this, I'm gonna be put in witness protection and then I won't ever hear it again."

That was that, in the end. There was no more arguments from Jack, and even after listening to Beverly's ranting and swearing for forty five minutes he still hadn't changed his mind - so he signed the paperwork. That day he left the office after receiving a pat on the back from people he'd barely talked with during the four years he'd been working with the FBI, a hug from Katz where they both ignored that his shirt was damp at the collar and her hair felt wet when they parted, and a nod from Jack. He would receive the address of his new apartment tomorrow alongside with the information for the bank account they'd set up for him. There wasn't much for him to pack up, just a box of clothes that he'd bring with him (he'd leave all his suits behind), and another two boxes filled with his books and some small trinkets he'd collected over the years.

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The new apartment was tiny, a barely there shoe box with thin walls without proper insulation, creaky floors and a bedroom that would barely fit a twin bed. Will instantly loved it. The landlord was an elderly man with a broken english accent and clear eyes, barely tall enough to reach Will's shoulders due to his hunched back, and with an unmistakable mustache gracing his upper lip. He told Will that the rent was due on the 16th of every month, no exception, there were no pets allowed, and that if he had any noise complaints in regards to the other tenants, he should either keep them to himself or he could try taking them up with said tenants.

It barely took him two hours to get settled in and to check to see what the bureau had left as a parting gift in his bank account. 3000$. By the time the deposit for the apartment and the first rent's worth was paid he was left with 1400$ to buy new furniture and groceries. It took him a while to find a second hand shop that would be willing to help move the heavier furniture as the twin bed and couch he bought, as well as a small coffee table, and by the time he got back into his new home Will was too exhausted to think of how to even consider how to infiltrate the Lithuanian mob family. Or, a seemingly more pressing concern, how to produce a steady income to keep his newfound home.

Waking up the next day Will made a game plan. If Jack refused to give him a mission perimeter, he would give himself one.

Step one, buy a coffee maker.

Step two, find a job.

Step three, find someone - anyone - connected to Lecter's crew and find a way in.

Before dinnertime that day he'd bought a cheap coffee maker at some garage sale intended to fund some school class' expedition trip to the zoo, and he found a job waiting tables and cleaning up at The Archangel, a small scale Jazz club only ten blocks from his apartment. The manager, Tina Thompson, had taken one look at him and smirked.

"So, which is it, looking for a job or looking for a beau?" She asked.

She was pretty, with her hair styled in an auburn bob, she was a tall woman, and the black suit pants and vest she wore didn't do anything to hide that. Neither did the 7inch high heeled pumps either. At Will's blank face she just laughed.

"You're either here for a job or a lover, and with the way you're looking, I'd put money on the first one."

"A job, if you have one," Will said, looking at her cheek and noting how the faint blush accommodated the tan of her skin, "I'm willing to do anything, and I'm a hard worker."

"Oh man, they're gonna eat you alive, kitten."

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He started working that night, arriving at The Archangel at 7pm sharp, he was handed a pair of black slacks and a black vest matching the one that Tina wore. The clothes were a bit too snug on him, but before he was even able to voice a question to Tina he was informed that if he was able to last a week she'd treat him to a fitting uniform. He didn't tell her that he was accustomed to clothes that didn't fit - growing up living from hand to mouth had taught him how to take pleasure in the small things. Like the fact that he

did have clothes.

By the first hour into his first shift Will wondered how the FBI, or any other law enforcement agency for that matter, didn't simply recruit waiters. Despite having learned at an early age never to look down on anyone over what job they had, or didn't have, Will had severely underestimated the upper body strength required to carry a tray with drinks to and from tables. And the amount of patience required when faced with people repeatedly pinching your butt.

By the end of the night he'd somehow gotten into some strange friendship and companionship with Dalia Derus, a slightly terrifying 24 year old Lithuanian woman with platinum blonde hair and near black eyes, who worked the VIP-tables and the bar of The Archangel. Dalia had warned him when a group of middle aged women sat down by one of his tables, told him to make sure he never turned his back on them whilst being within reaching distance - lest he'd discover bruises on his butt and the back of his thighs in the morning. After the last guests

left for the night, Will found himself leaning against the bar, trading life stories with Dalia, receiving a shot of Russian vodka every time she felt pity for him. Tina came up to them after the fourth shot and told them to take it easy - until Dalia told her about their little game, and she wanted to join in. Will got five shots simply by talking about his experience with high school.

Lying in his bed that night, Will stared up onto the spinning ceiling, and allowed himself to forget that he was supposed to be on an undercover assignment, that his death would surely come soon and be painful, and he simply allowed himself to feel some sort of joy of being part of a community. Even if that community was simply brought together by sexually inappropriate soccer moms, bad high school experiences, and Russian vodka.

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As the weeks passed by Will settled into some sort of rhythm. He'd wake up at noon, drink his first cup of coffee standing in his underwear listening to his neighbours either trying to kill each other, or, trying to fuck each other to an inch of their lives. He was never sure which. After that he'd get dressed, and since he'd yet to splurge on clothes there weren't a huge sampling to take from (much to Dalia and Tina's grief), before he grabbed his keys and wallet and walked out of his apartment. He'd learned to recognize the people living on his block, and those surrounding him, and he'd even found a small convenience shop where he could by food and other utensils. With how the money the bureau had left him had dried up despite Will's desperate attempts to hide some away for a rainy day, he counted his blessings that Dalia had vouched for him for the old lady, or senelė as Dalia called her, who owned and ran the shop.

"Saldainiukas, look at what you're wearing! Did your mother never teach you to dress for the weather?" Irma asked, throwing her hands up in exasperation, "It will snow soon and you're walking around like, like, like it's almost ready for summer snow!"

Will had been confused the first times it happened. At the age of 22 he had long since passed the time where it would have been appropriate for people to comment on his clothing fitting for the season, and as a child, the idea of his son being affected by the changing seasons never seemed to enter his father's mind. Still, Irma seemed to feel like she had the God given right to take upon her the role as Will's adoptive grandmother.

Looking down on himself he couldn't see the problem though. His jeans were clean, a bit faded from the wash, sure, but useable. His converse were a bit worn, but that was apparently the fashion these days, and besides, there were no holes in the soles. He was even wearing a black hoodie over his t-shirt. It might not keep the november chill completely at bay, but it was more than enough for a quick trip to the store to get supplies.

"I'm sorry?" Will said, looking at Irma's hands, "I don't expect that there will be snow until later tonight."

Irma looked at him with a stern expression on her face, and lifted a can of tomato soup to point it at him.

"The weather is no joke, saldainiukas. Hypothermia is very dangerous. My cousin lost two fingers back in '59 during the winter back home-"

Her no doubt long and well rehearsed rant was cut short by the small bell over the door ringing, and a middle aged woman walked in with two children. After a quick nod towards the newcomers, Will took the opportunity for what it was, and scurried away to find the food he needed.

"Maria, how wonderful to see you, how is Tommy doing?"

Irma's voice followed him as he walked between the isles, and he payed half an ears worth of attention to the conversation as he tracked down pasta, tomatoes, bread and toilet paper. The idle chatter between the two women and the snickers and whispers of the children gave the small store a layer of warmth that Will found himself unaccustomed to. Growing up in a small town was often portrayed as the same as growing up with a tight knit community ready to help you and to catch you should you ever tremble, but in Will's experience wasn't even close to that. Growing up in a small town meant that everyone knew who he was, who his father was, it meant that no matter where he went he was subjected to the scrutiny that only a sheriff's son, or maybe a preacher's child, could ever experience. Everyone seemed to hold him to the standard they expected from his father, and they seemed to take their clues as in how to handle him from the older man.

Sheriff Marcus John Graham was a strict man. He had been born into a born-again christian family, and whilst he himself didn't lead the same straight religious life his parents had before

him, he never did forget the fact that he owed life to his lord and savior, Christ almighty. He had met Will's mother one fateful monday afternoon, and three months later they were married - a shotgun wedding that Marcus Graham would never forgive his son for. When Will's mother passed when the boy was only at the tender age of five, Marcus Graham knew that it was God sending out his punishment for the life they had created outside of the holy wedlock, and if God were to send out his punishment for them giving Will life, Marcus would send out his own punishment to Will for accepting it. Will grew up with faint memories of a mother long gone, and a father too far into his bottle of whiskey to ever wonder how come he was the only one in class who didn't get a note in his lunchbox. Or who didn't get a lunchbox at all.

Shaking his head, Will tried to shield away from the pictures of a little boy wearing too thin clothes during the cold winter nights, and focused on his shopping. Throwing in a box of earl gray tea, he started making his way back towards the registre, where Irma was still talking with the lady. Looking at her children, Will remembered that they lived two blocks away from him. The two boys always looked happy, despite complaining when their mother called their names from the balcony, reminding them that if they wanted the ability to sit comfortably, they would come in and put on their jackets.

"Now you go on home and put on some more clothes, saldainiukas, before you freeze to death." Irma said as she accepted his money.

"Yes, ma'am." he murmured, taking the bags in one hand, and started making his way back to his apartment.

When he closed the door behind him, he barely remembered the walk home. Jack Crawford had sent him on a mission to find and bring down Hannibal Lecter, but so far, all that Will had done was start etching his way into the community surrounding him. Packing away his groceries and brewing a cup of tea, Will sat down and tried to remember if there were any known locations where Lecter's crew might be found.

He was sent on a mission, after all. Not to find a new life. Or to dwell in the pains of his old one.

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When 7pm rolled around and he stood in the backroom of the Archangel pulling his uniform on, Dalia and Tina both joined him for an impromptu staff meeting ("No, we don't need all the staff. Think of it more as a waiter-staff meeting.") and Will tried to figure out if this was normal within the service industry or if this was simply a strictly Archangel thing. Figuring out how to wiggle out if his jeans and into the black suit pants without accidently giving his company the unfortunate view of his scrawny legs proved to be more difficult than he imagined, and he tried to not allow the catcalls and snickers to get to him, and he could feel the back of his neck heat up with a blush as he fastened his belt.

"Is there a reason why the two of you are in here while I'm changing or is it simply to because you're curious about how far it'll go before I have an aneurysm?" he asked, looking between Dalia's lips and Tina's right cheekbone.

"Of course there is," Dalia said, her accent thick over the words, "the possible aneurysm is simply a perk."

"We have a special VIP-guest today, and whilst I know that you and Dalia tend to ignore the fact that the VIP area is supposed to be restricted, even when it comes to the staff, and usually that is completely okay," Tina took a second to breathe, and Will realized how stressed she seemed to be. He wondered how he'd missed the signs, her hands slightly trembling, her lips swollen from the continued biting. "He's one of our best customers, and he's just returned to the city, and he is *not* accustomed to the lack of professionality that we've apparently dropped to. Dalia will remain in the VIP area, attending to our guests, and I need you to deal with the regular tables, Will."

"Wait, you need me to take all the regular tables?" Will asked, mentally going through the statistics he'd calculated on the amount of guests on each day only to arrive at an alarmingly high number, "What happened to Tommy? I thought he was supposed to work tonight?"

Tina sighed quietly, looking up at him from underneath his lashes, and Will had to restrain himself from pointing out that with how he only saw her eyes from his peripheral vision the act itself was nearly pointless, but the underlying tension in her body stopped his continued questions before he could voice them.

"Yes, I need you to take all the tables. Look, Will, I know that you're still pretty fresh and I know that it'll be a hell of a lot more work than what you signed up to, but Tommy called in

sick today and I have no other options," Tina said, "I'm really sorry for putting you in this situation, but I need to know if I can rely on you. Please."

"Okay."

"Okay?" Tina looked at him like she wanted to kiss him, and Will took a hasty step backwards, wringing his fingers in his sweater. "Okay." he repeated.

With the course of action set before them the ladies left the room and allowed him to finish getting ready in peace. His uniform didn't require much effort, black suit pants, black shirt and a black vest and tie on top. It wasn't much different from the uniform of his fellow brothers and sisters in blue, though Will himself had never donned the colors. He didn't change his top in front of the two women, a habit long since integrated in his brain put there by harsh words from his father's drunken mouth, enforced by the older man's belt buckle.

"Thus you are to know in your heart that the Lord your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son." Deuteronomy 8:5. His father taught Will that verse, amongst many others, between the lashes of his tongue and belt. God dealt out his punishment to Will, using his father as a tool in doing such, and long since Will himself had learned to accept the penance that God surely would grant him if he existed, the scars Marcus Graham left on his son stayed on his back, like the stars, telling the path once taken.

Will's face was grim when he finally stepped out from the backroom and into the club. It seemed like despite the good upturn of people there requiring his attention, his father would refuse to leave his mind, and the man stayed within Will's mind as he ran his legs out from himself fetching drinks and carrying ashtrays. The melodic jazz tunes of the evening seemed particularly blue and it made Will wonder if he was doomed to be followed by his father's ghost until the day he died. It was nearly at the end of his shift when he finally realized that the itchy feeling on the back of his neck was the feeling of eyes on him. Discreetly taking in the crowds, he realized that the gaze didn't come from the regular guests that he catered to - despite the fact that the group of middleaged soccer mom's firmly into their second bottle of chardonnay continued to send him leering stares - and that it in fact came from the VIP-area.

He couldn't properly see who the person looking at him was, the VIP-area raised slightly from the rest of the club and scarcely lit, but he *knew* that that was the origin of the feeling. He felt like he was being stalked, like prey, and surprisingly enough he wasn't quite sure how exactly he felt about that. A small part of him was simply happy about getting a rest from the

attention fixated on him by the mothers, but another part was worried - what could a VIP guest be interested in him for anyway? Was there a possibility that he'd been made, that they knew that he was with the FBI?

Will drew his focus back towards his own tables. 23 guests had been seated by his tables this evening, and it appeared that if he stopped for as much as a second, he would fall behind on the mountain of drink orders and requests for the bill. Taking a second more to simply breathe deeply, he hoped to at least get some decent tips out of the evening. Gods knew that the soccer moms had all pinched his butt and the back of his upper thighs enough that he felt he was owed a fortune. Counting to ten in his mind, Will took a deep breath before he walked back into the lion's den; a batchulette party.

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By the time his shift ended that night, Will was absolutely sure that his thighs and backside was covered in bruises, and that he'd worn holes in his shoes. Leaning heavily on the bar he tried in vain to gain the sympathy of Tina so that she'd let him simply lay down underneath the counter and sleep there - and not be forced to walk back to his apartment. Whoever it was that decided the workout routine for the academy should take a look on the physical endurance, let alone the patience to not commit a violent act, that the service professions required.

"Toughen up, sugar," Tina said, looking unrealistically refreshed as she dried the last glasses from that night's dishes. "Count your tip for the night and see if that doesn't spike some energy in you."

"Ugh, don't even. I swear, I have never felt this violated before. I feel like all they saw when they looked at me was a piece of meat," Will groaned, "And don't even start with me about how that's what it's like being a woman. Dalia already did that earlier."

"It's truuuue!" Dalia singsang in a silly voice. She was seated on the bat counter with her legs crossed and her head almost completely buried in the tip jar, "But let's be fair, with that baby face of yours it's natural for people to get it wrong - Hey, Tina, do you have the change for a 50 back there? - it doesn't make it right, but it's the way it works."

He dropped his head on the bar counter and groaned once more, trying his best to ignore Tina's chuckles. Maybe he should grow out his beard? It wouldn't necessarily hide the innocence his face seemed to convey, but it would go along way in helping.

"Hey, Will, someone left you a note in the tip jar," Dalia said, holding said note over her head. Raising his head to look at her, Will met her grin with a quizzical gaze.

"What?"

"Well, I think it's for you," She leaned towards him, holding the note out in her hand, "It doesn't say your name or anything, but it *does* say berniukas, and you're the only berniukas here."

Taking the note from her Will tried to ignore the trepidation in his head. Was this a threat? Was it someone from the bureau? Opening the note, his adrenaline kicked in, and Will could feel his focus honing in on it, dropping the chatter and inquisitive questions the two women shot at him. When he finally managed to see the message left behind for him, he had more questions than he did when it was first left in his hand.

"Next time; break their hands. H.L."

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Y'all. The feedback this fic has gotten is completely beyond what I could ever imagine, and I would like to take a second to just thank you all. Seriously. I love you and I get misty eyed from reading through these comments! Y'all are amazing! <3
Second; To *"Hannibal Lecter"*, I know you felt like this fic contained too much OC's and too little Hannibal Lecter so here's a chapter filled with OC's and no Hannibal Lecter. :)))))

Third: This chapter contains implied sexual abuse as a child. There are no details and no discussion of it.

My beloved Dena helped me with providing her astonishing beta services today, however, I am highly impatient and I wanted to post this chapter *now*. So any and all faults and wrong words are on my cape alone. Dena, I love you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will had tried figuring out who the note was from, had walked across the panel floors of his apartment so many times he was kinda surprised that there wasn't a hole there yet, had wrinkled the piece of paper and unwrinkled it so many times that he worried it might fall apart. The idea that it was simply someone offering a friendly piece of advice had crossed his mind, but he'd soon discarded it - your average Joe didn't exactly leave notes recommending physical assault for people they'd never talked to in a tip jar. He considered the possibility that Jack Crawford had decided to put a tail on him, at least for the time being, and that the poor agent felt sorry enough for him. He even considered the possibility that someone had made him, and that particular idea nearly caused him to quit his job and simply stay in his apartment. That plan had quickly been sabotaged by Dalia who, for some God forsaken reason, had decided that despite him being a fully capable adult, she should adopt him as a kind of little brother. She'd generously given him a full ten hour sleep after their shift before she came to pick him up, dragging him to a small blink-and-you'll-miss-it restaurant, ordering them the best cheeseburger and fries Will had ever tasted. He figured that the threat of having been made by some kind of criminal wouldn't be the worst fate in the world - not if he managed to convince Dalia to bring him back sometime.

The weeks passed, and as the weather continued to chill, the note continued to exist as a small mystery in the Archangel. Despite, or maybe even because of, that there hadn't been any repeat occurrences. Will tried not to focus too much on it, his attention pulled taught between settling into the routine his new life required, and the slight panic that almost a month after he went undercover, he *still* didn't have a way in with Lecter's crew. And while

he wanted to focus all his energy and thought into fixing that problem, he found himself reluctant to give anything less than a hundred percent at the Archangel, especially as November had rolled into December, and Tina seemed to put all the focus into themed nights. Will ran his legs off every afternoon and evening trying to remember if that night was *"Lady's night"* or *"Blue Love night"* or something called *"naktį mėgėjams"* which seemed to draw every single couple between the ages of 21 and 87. After a memorable situation where an elderly lady had taken insult to Will's behavior towards her husband, and started shouting at him in rapid lithuanian, Dalia had explained the meaning behind *naktį mėgėjams* (night of lovers), and how the old crow had believed Will to try and draw her husband's attention away from her. Apparently one didn't come between a couple and expect to live, and especially not on the night that the Archangel dedicated to love.

"You are like a, shit, what's the word, little dog?" Dalia said, looking at him sympathetically when they closed the doors behind the last of the lovers night's visitors, "Always looking to please and so innocent."

Will sputtered.

"First of all, I think the word you're looking for is *puppy* , and second, I'm not looking to please anyone, let alone *you* ," Will said, standing behind the bar, looking over the list of inventory that they would have to order, "and even if I *were* looking to please anyone, you're too young for me, babe." Winking in Dalia's general direction, he figured that the offered information would at least be enough to grant him a couple of minutes of silence.

He was wrong.

"Too young- what, I mean, *blet* , I have two more years than you!" Dalia protested, her arms flying dangereously close to his head as she gestured.

"Will, what have I said about damaging Dalia's head, hm?" Tina said, sneaking up behind him, hands on his hips as she passed him.

"Jis sakė, kad aš buvau per jauna jam! Ar manote, kad? Grubus!" Dalia half-shouted, the lithuanian rolling of her tongue in a far more familiar way than english ever did. Will was transfixed - it wasn't unusual for the girls to speak their native tongue with each other, but for some reason they found it rude to do so in front of him, and despite Will's many objections,

or his pleadings, he rarely got to hear them speak so freely. He could see Dalia smirk from the corner of his eyes,and he wondered silently just *what* she'd told the other woman.

"So, mommy kink or daddy kink, kūdikis?" Tina said, a hand reaching out to grab his hip once more. Will wasn't quite sure what had happened.

"W-what?" He sputtered, realizing that the hint of information had come back to bite him in the ass, a blush trailing its way hotly over his neck and the tips of his ears, contradiction the ice taking over his veins, "what are you talking about?"

"I mean, since Dalia is too young for you..." Tina let her words trail off in a hinting manner, and Will felt his blush intensify.

"Every time you call your boyfriend 'Daddy' Sigmund Freud's ghost gains strength!" he croaked. "Just because someone has a taste for a more experienced lover doesn't mean that they have need to bring in thoughts of their parents to the act!" He brushed Tina's hand off his hip, taking a sharp step to the left, re-focusing his attention to the list.

"Damn," Dalia said softly, "sorry if we hit a nerve, Will. We were just messing around."

"Yeah," Tina agreed, patting his shoulder once, twice, three times, before backing off.

Will knew it wasn't their fault, that they couldn't have known, that they hopefully still *didn't* know, how Sheriff Graham had done his best to teach Will how to be *Daddy's good little boy* , how soft hands and pettings clashed with hard fists and harsh words. Shaking his head softly, Will tried to dislodge the memories threatening to drown him.

"It's okay," Will said, noting down an order for four bottles of Jack Daniels.

...

Settling into a routine was strangely easy. Like his brain had suddenly decided to forgo all it's earlier experiences, forget every instinct he had, and start relying on the people and life surrounding him. He started to expect Mrs. Moris, an eighty-seven year old lady who came in every Wednesday evening at eight, wearing her finest fur coat, ordering a simple whiskey and enjoying the music before leaving at eleven pm sharp, never saying a word more than needed. He started to expect the group of barely legal girls, always dressed to impress in their short skirts and low cut tops, who came in every Friday night only to get uncontrollably drunk, grabbing his ass and posting selfies to their instagram feeds. He started to expect the soccer moms who all came in during the afternoons, during the beginning of his shifts, ordering wine and sneakingly trying to grab his ass, his thighs, and, on one memorable occasion, his dick. He grew accustomed to the chilliness of his apartment, of always needing to wear the woolen socks that Irma knitted and forced on him. But however hard he tried, he couldn't get used to the notes that seemed to magically show up in the tip jar, three more having appeared since the first.

"She does not need that hand, would you like me to remove it for her? H.L."

The second note arrived after one of the moms, Denise, had overpassed her two-glass limit of white wine, and tried shoving her hand down the front of his pants, not taking his no for an answer, requiring both Dalia and Tina to interfere. Will had felt a strange sense of warmth in his chest after reading it, though he would deny it to his dying day.

"Aristotle said, Anybody can become angry - that is easy, but to be angry with the right person and to the right degree and at the right time and for the right purpose, and in the right way - that is not within everybody's power and is not easy. H.L."

The third note came the night where he'd had an argument with his neighbour, something petty, just a reason for him to move on the *rage* building inside him, the frustration with not finding an in, with disappointing Jack. He'd let his ire out on Dalia and Tina, snapping at the them, being crude and surrounded by the black cloud hanging over his head. Reading the note forced him to take a step back, and he ended up apologizing to them. Tina laughed and said that the notes seemed to be working for him., and that whoever this H.L. was, they better not stop.

"I care. H.L."

The fourth note wrapped itself around his heart like english ivy, coming on a day where Will's ghosts seemed to try to conspire to overturn him, dragging him under, making him wonder if the world wouldn't be better off without him. Surely Jack could find another agent, someone more capable, someone who would find another in with the lithuanian mob, someone who would do it *right* . He hadn't realized that he was that transparent, that people could see right through him. But maybe H.L. had simply seen one of those moments that Will had tried to keep to himself, those few seconds he'd allow himself to push his fingernails into his wrists, leaving angry half-moon shapes behind.

He wasn't expecting the notes, perhaps by some strange form of self-preservation, not wanting to get his hopes up, only to be disappointed once more. By the end of his shift on december 28th, Will was ready to throw in the towel, to simply lay down and let Jack know that he couldn't do this, he wouldn't be able to find a way in, to fix it, that ack had been wrong in assuming that Will was good for anything. Until. Until a gorgeous lady with wild red curls falling down her back like a waterfall entered the club, wearing a sleek black dress and blood red high heals, an equally gorgeous brunette with a kind face wearing a dark pantsuit on her arm. He knew who they were before they sat down at his table, knew them *intimately* , had studied them both at the academy and when he prepped for the case. Freddie Lounds and Alana Bloom. Master spy and second in command in the Brolybė.

Walking towards them Will tried to swallow against his suddenly dry throat.

"What can I do for you, ladies?" he asked.

"Whiskey, neat. For the both of us," Lounds said, a smirk gracing her lips, "and before you ask, I prefer my whiskey like I like my men, twice my age and from Scotland."

Will nodded, and turned on his heels. Ducking behind the bar, he reached up and grabbed a bottle of 60-year-old Glenfarclas, one of their finest bottles, hoping that it would be to Lounds' standards. Walking back towards the two women, Will's attention was drawn between trying not to fall on his ass like a toddler and spill two glasses of a 18 thousand dollar whiskey, and coming up with an idea on how to befriend the pair. The thought made a jab of insecurity make it’s presence known in his stomach - Will had never been good at making friends. The walk ended way to so, and before he knew it, he was placing the glasses on the table, watching Lounds bring it to her lips and taking a careful sip before humming.

"Good choice, kid," she said, barely looking up at him.

Alana Bloom lifted her glass, mimicking her companion, before humming in agreement, "Yes, though I somehow doubt you would have disappointed."

Will wasn't quite sure what had happened, nor what it meant, but as he walked over to *the soccer mom table* , he felt a skip in his step that hadn't been there in a while. Maybe there was hope after all.

Chapter End Notes

Translations on the Lithuanian courtesy of Google translate:

blet - fuck
"Jis sakė, kad aš buvau per jauna jam! Ar manote, kad? Grubus!" - "He said I was too young for him! Can you believe that? Rude!"
kūdikis - baby

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

I am so sorry for the long wait! Would you believe me if I said that time ran away from me?

Warnings for this chapter includes alcoholism, child-abuse (not too detailed) and alcohol as a coping mechanism.

This chapter is NOT beta-read, so please; If you see something, say something - but please say so kindly.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Losing himself in the rhythm of his new life and new friendships was easier than Will would ever deem possible, too easy perhaps, but as every instinct in his body screamed at him to ease back, to remember that they would soon leave, that he would soon leave, his heart refused to go back to being that lonely little boy looking in n the other children playing. Instead he found himself clutching to the friendship Tina and Dalia offered, and eventually even the steady pleasantries exchanged with the people living in his neighborhood. He knew it was strange, that this wouldn't last and that he was setting himself up for more heartbreak than needed, that if Jack could see him now he would rip Will a new one for forgetting his *actual* job, for taking his eyes off the prize.

He knew the moment he agreed to sign up for this task that his life would never be the same. He knew that he was agreeing to forgo all his traditions, to abandon those few friends he had, to abandon his family, never to see any of them again. He knew this. And yet. And yet when Tina explained that the Archangel would be closed for New Year's Eve, consequently forcing him to ring in the New Year alone, he was struck by the knowledge that he would be, for the first time in months, alone. Tina and Dalia were both celebrating with their respective families, and despite their invitations, Will knew that he shouldn't force himself further into their personal lives than he already was. The holidays were for family, after all, and one thing Will had learned through his life, it was that family wasn't an open solution – there were no room for strangers.

Waving away their concerns, Will braced himself for the tang of loneliness he was sure to come. He was no stranger to solitude, would even often choose it willingly before, forgoing the chance to go out for a Friday night drink with his fellow students at the academy to spend time alone with his books. He thought that was what he wanted – and some part of him even celebrated the fact that he wasn't dependent on the confirmation of his fellow men, but as the

last of the patrons of the Archangel walked through the doors the night before New Year, Will realized, that there was a significant difference between solitude by choice, and that by force.

A small note was left in the tip jar for him, and the pang of gratitude and joy that he felt at the sight of it was smothered when he noticed the difference in the hand writing. Whoever left this note, it was not the mysterious H.L.

Happy New Year's, dear. Thank you for the old; and we'll say welcome to the new. – A friend.

The writing on the note was smaller, neater, than he was used to. Clearly written by a woman's hand, but when he showed it to Tina and Dalia, neither recognized it, and Will couldn't see any signs of deception in their faces. Tucking the note into his pocket, he wondered if it was a collective choice people here had not to talk to people to their faces, or if he was simply the exception to the rule.

…

As a child, the New Year was brought forth by his father's nostalgic mood, often bringing Will close, telling him about his mother, the woman she was, wondering out loud about the women she would have been – had it not been for Will. Marcus John Graham would only bare speaking of his wife when he had a bottle of whiskey to ease the word's way out of his mouth, and Will learned at an early age to take any and all opportunity to hide. Coming back to school he would hear stories of his classmates enjoying a special dinner with their family, how they would play with firecrackers and watch the ball drop at midnight; and when it was his turn to speak, Will could never find the words needed to explain. How did you explain that you brought forth the new year hiding inside the kitchen cupboards, praying that your father wouldn't find you, listening to chairs shattering against walls, screams and shouts and howls of pain mixing together until there was just too much *noise* .

New year's as a teenager was strangely different, and still eerily similar. After escaping his father, Will drowned himself in the attempts of finding normality; attempting to date, attempting to find friends. Unfortunately the social aspect of life didn't seem to want to function for him, and the only relief he was given was when he breezed through high school and the academy, and when he bought the cheap, almost completely watered down version of whiskey that his father used to favor, drinking himself into black out after blackout. After all; New Year's Eve was meant to be brought in with a big bang, wasn't it?

Celebrating his first, and maybe even last, New Year Will decided to keep on to the traditions. After dressing and brushing his teeth that morning, he walked out of his apartment, content with the knowledge that he wouldn't be returning for at least a day, and set the course for the nearest liquor store. The white blanket of snow that had overtaken the town the night before amplified the sound of his steps, leaving Will with a jittery feeling, making him look over his shoulder, as if expecting to find someone behind him - his father, agent Crawford, he couldn't be sure.

The poor middle aged man standing behind the registre barely gave him a once over when Will dropped two bottles of cheap whiskey on the counter. Will barely took in his appearance, too preoccupied with the shaky feeling of *wrong* that had gripped him tight from the moment he opened his eyes that morning, and when the man barked out the total of $22. Dropping the cash on the counter, Will took the bottles in shaky hands, and walked out the door.

The snow crunched underneath his shoes, and in some far away part of Will's mind, he wondered if perhaps an old and beaten pair of sneakers wouldn't be a poor choice for the seasonal weather. The cold was seeping into his bones, and by the time he reached his final destination - a small park just four blocks from his building - Will couldn't contain the shaking and shuddering of his hands. Taking a seat on a bare spot provided by a large pine tree, Will leaned his back on the trunk, struggling to open the first bottle.

"Happy new year," he muttered, words near lost with the clicking of his teeth, before taking a huge gulp. The whiskey was sour, burning the roof of his mouth and the back of his throat, and Will had to fight the urge to spit it back out. "Oh well, I guess you get what you pay for."

The second gulp was easier. The third even more so. And by the forth he could barely feel his mouth anyway.

He wasn't sure how long he'd been sitting there when the noise of crunching snow alerted him to someone's incoming presence. The first bottle was gone, and in his attempts to open the second one, he'd spilled near half, causing him to venture onto his hands and knees, tears streaming down his face. That was the position he was in when a pair of dark snow boots stopped in front of him. His head snapped up too quickly, causing his stomach to convulse, and he barely had the time to make a sound before the contents of his stomach scattered across the woodland floor, barely missing the strangers shoes by mere inches.

“‘m sorry,” Will mumbled, trying to wipe his mouth, only to realize that he’d failed in even lifting his hand.

“A bit cold to take a late evening drink outside, don’t you think?” The stranger asked, his voice deep and accented, and oh god it was pretty. “Thank you,” The stranger said, voice now filled with mirth, and *oh God* he’d said that out loud.

“Cold.”

“I can imagine so, yes. You’re not dressed for this weather at all.”

Will finally managed to sit back on his ass, lifting his head slowly to look up at the stranger, finally seeing the face to go with the voice for the first time. He froze in his spot. Will knew that face, had spent hours upon hours studying it, had imagined seeing it in person countless times, had memorised it to the point that he could pick it out of a crowd. Hannibal Lecter. The realization made his stomach grumble, and a cold sweat broke out on Will’s skin. He’d nearly thrown up on the shooes of Hannibal Lecter. Looking up at his face now, Will didn’t see any of the murderous intent he was expecting, only a strange frown between Lecter’s brows, a miniscule thing, really. When it appeared that Will wasn’t going to say anything else, Lecter sighed before crouching down, carefully avoiding the vomit between them.

“I can not leave you here with a good conscience, boy. Do you have any family you should call? Anyone who is looking for you?” Lecter’s voice was quiet, his tone even, and Will wanted him to keep talking, unable to explain how his voice filled the void inside Will’s chest. Will shook his head. *No* . “Alright. I’ll have to insist that we seek some warmth though; I don’t like the color of your lips.”

Will wondered if he should be insulted at that or not.

Before he could speak of the imagined insult though, Lecter stood, and walked to his side, before crouching down to aid Will in bringing his arm around his shoulder. The moment the leather clad hand got in contact with Will’s skin, he hissed, burned by the touch, and as if on cue, his body realized just *how* cold he really was. The walk over to a beautiful, black Bentley Arnage was almost lost on Will, and despite knowing that he was practically forcing Lecter to take his body weight, Will couldn’t make his legs work properly. He whined when he got deposited in the passenger seat of the car, already missing the heat of Lecter’s body,

and the smell of his cologne - something subtle, unrecognizable to Will, but the smell of it was warm and comforting. By the time Lecter crossed over to the other side of the car and started up the hot air circulation, Will was near exhaustion but his mind wouldn't allow his body to rest. Lecter was a mob boss. He was Will's target. He had murdered and tortured and threatened and stolen. He was a cruel man without a heart or a soul, a true psychopath. But he'd picked Will up from the snow. He brought Will to his car. He handed him a handkerchief when Will's nose started running. So which one was the real one?

"What is your name?" Lecter asked, eyes on the road, hands steady on the wheel.

"'ill," he coughed and tried again, "Will."

"And how old are you, William?"

"'m 22."

"And how come you were alone, in the snow, drinking whiskey on new year's eve? Shouldn't you be somewhere downtown with your fellow youngsters, engaging in socially ambiguous behavior?"

"All alone," Will whispered, eyes dropping, his blinks getting drawn out, "The world is forgetting me, so I am all alone."

By the time his body won the fight over his mind, Will wasn't sure if he really heard the sad sigh coming from beside him, or if he really felt the hand stroking his curls. And waking up the next day, he wouldn't remember it anyway.

Chapter End Notes

And finally the king is here!

Please remember that comments and kudos activate my praise kink, and as always, I can be found both on tumblr and in Hell.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

It's 1.30AM here, I need to get up at 6AM, this has not been beta'ed.

Also, just so everyone knows;
1. This fic will not be abandoned without warning; It might take me forever to write this shit, but it will be written and posted.
2. English is not my first language. Please be kind and consider this.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Waking up the next morning Will knew three things:

One, the prohibition era was actually a good idea and not, in fact, the government trying to control it’s citizens.

Two, he was never drinking alcohol again.

And three, this was not his bed.

Sitting up carefully, Will braced himself for the expected tell-tail giveaway as to why he was in a stranger’s bed. When the usual soreness didn’t immediately announce it’s presence, he couldn’t help frowning to himself - a strange prickling of anxiety lodged itself in his chest. It wasn’t unusual for him to wake up on the first morning of the new year in someone else’s bed, or for him to be alone when waking up, but the thought that he’d been the one to top was. Of course, he could have spent the night with a woman, but looking around the room, Will took in the earthy browns and gold highlights the room was decorated in, as well as the leather and wood theme, which all lead to the conclusion that this was a man’s bedroom. Throwing the duvet to the side, Will was unprepared for the soreness in his arms, and for the fact that he was only in his underwear and t-shirt. Frowning to himself he threw his legs over the side, winching with the pain. He felt like he’d taken one hell of a beating, but a quick glance showed no signs of bruises or markings. As he stood, oh so carefully, the anxious feeling in his chest intensified.

The hardwood floor was cold underneath his feet, and he felt a shiver run up his spine, as he took a careful survey over the room. There was two doors, the double bed with a dark, wooden frame, a dark wooden dresser, a brown leather chair and two nightstands matching the bed. There was pictures on the walls, in heavy golden frames, displaying scenes of nature like Will had never seen outside of tv before. Losing himself in the pictures, Will didn't realize that he was shaking until the chattering of his teeth became too loud for his ears to ignore - and despite his eyes feasting on the image of a woodland spring, his body suffered the cruel fate of the Baltimore winter.

Tearing his gaze from the picture, Will tried to locate his clothes, and when he couldn't find them within the room, he cautiously opened the first door, bracing himself for dangers unknown. It went on quiet hinches, thankfully, and revealed a tastefully decorated bathroom, with white tile walls and granite sinks. Walking in slowly, Will hissed at the near scorching sensation that the heated floor tiles left in the soles of his feet. He relieved himself, and walking towards the sink to wash his hands, he couldn't escape the thought that whoever it was that lived here, they sure had a lot of money. His bet was on old family fortune, the decor too subtle for those who found their wealth too sudden. The tempered water felt amazing over his skin, and Will stood there for several moments, simply letting it wash over him before he wiped them on a towel with a higher threadcount than his IQ.

With his clothes nowhere to be found in the bathroom either, Will wandered back into the bedroom. He considered throwing all caution to the wind, to simply walk out the second door and find his way out of this house, clothes be damned, when there was a knock on the door. The lowkey humming of anxiety that had been located in his chest since he woke up skyrocketed at the sound, and Will braced himself for any kind of monster to walk through the door, as he watched the door handle slowly turn. When the door opened to reveal none other than Hannibal Lecter standing there, balancing a tray with what what smelled mouthwatering like eggs and meats and coffee, dressed in a checked suit, Will found himself revisiting the idea of being prepared for anyone.

"Ah, you're awake," Lecter said, walking confidently into the room with an easy smile.

"W-where am I?" Will asked, trying to force his legs to work, to run, to take the open door as the opportunity it surely was.

"Oh, forgive me my rudeness," Lecter said, placing the tray carefully on the bed, before straightening up and looking straight at Will, "my name is Hannibal Lecter, and you are in my home. I found you in the park yesterday evening, severely hypothermic and quite clearly intoxicated."

When several seconds passed and Will didn't respond, Lecter looked pointedly at the tray he had brought in, clearing his throat carefully. "A protein scramble, to help you regain your strength. And coffee, to ward off the chill." He said. Will couldn't help but stare at him.

"Where is my clothes? What happened to them?" He asked, looking at the man standing in front of him, trying to get a read on him.

Lecter looked at the offered food with a soft sigh, as if he was grieving it's waste, and Will felt his muscles lock at the sound. His father had done that too, whenever Will had said or done something that warranted a reaction, as if he couldn't grasp how Will didn't manage to steer clear of troubles himself, how he couldn't see the labyrinth of traps that was laid out before him, changed each day, always different, but always leading to the same painful outcome.

"-in a couple of minutes, I would expect."

Lecter's voice brought Will back from the memories, and he found himself shaking once more, though he didn't account this to be from the chilliness of the room.

"I'm sorry, what?" Will asked, looking at the man with what he hoped was a neutral expression.

Lecter frowned slightly, and made an aborted motion as to walk towards Will, only to stop when the younger man tensed.

"Are you alright? The mixture of the alcohol and the cold might have taken more out of you than you realized."

"I'm fine, just, what did you say happened to my clothes?" Will snapped, only to flinch at his own tone of voice. He was starting to feel like a caged animal, his mind flickering between the image of Lecter's patient face and his father's disapproving glares.

“I said that you were drenched to the bone when I found you last night, and in order to help your body gain some highly needed heat, I helped you out of them when we returned here. I have washed them for you, and they’re currently in the dryer now. They should be ready in a couple of minutes.” Lecter’s accent tilted the words, making it easier to focus on it, and Will found himself unconsciously twisting towards it with all of his being, “Now I would advise you to get back into bed for the time being, and do try to eat something. It will help with the lingering effects of the alcohol.”

Will was moving before he was conscious about it, his legs already walking towards the bed, and climbing into it, before the action was processed by his brain. When he was rewarded by a slight upturn of Lecter’s lips, he couldn’t stop the warmth from spreading within his chest. Maybe he actually *was* damaged by his actions last night? When Lecter indicated towards the tray, Will lifted it into his lap, and stared at the display on it. The plate was fixed dead center on the tray, with a fork and a knife folded skillfully into a napkin on the right side, and the coffee cup placed a thumbs width above them, and a glass of water a thumbs width to the coffee’s left. Picking up the fork from it’s intricate prison, Will tried to reconcile the information he had on Hannibal Lecter from his file with the information he gained from this. Generosity wasn’t something mentioned in the file, but the perfectionistic tendencies displayed by the tray certainly was. Balancing a forkful of eggs and sausage, Will couldn’t contain the small whimper that escaped him when the taste of it erupted across his tongue.

With a small nodd in his direction, Lecter took measured steps towards the leather chair, bringing it up to the bed with a surprising amount of ease. Taking his seat, he merely watched Will eat, his face blank, but his eyes filled with something strangely like curiosity.

“William, was it?” He asked.

The food turned to ash in his mouth. How did Lecter know his name? How much *did* he know? Will tried to search his memory of the night before, but it was all a haze, like he was looking through fogged glass, only finding the lingering taste of cheap whiskey and cold, a painful cold. He had to try and swallow his food twice, watching Lecter sitting in his chair with the appearance of someone without a care in the world - his legs crossed at the knees, fingers idly plucking imaginary lint from his pants.

“Will, please,” Will said, eyes tracking the shape of Lecter’s mouth, “And thank you, for the meal. And for letting me stay here, although I’m not quite sure as to why exactly you decided to bring me in?”

If Will hadn't been watching Lecter so closely, he didn't think he would have seen the barely there confused twist of his lips, or the small tick of his jaw.

"It wouldn't have been very polite of me to let you freeze to death on New Year's eve, would it?" Lecter asked, though his tone gave Will the impression that he was not expecting, nor wishing, an answer, "I can assure you that my intentions were nothing but pure. Now, finish your meal before it gets cold, berniukas."

The lithuanian word tickled a bell in Will's memory, but he pushed it aside - he'd probably just heard Dalia or Tina use it sometime, his brain cataloguing it for some strange reason. Picking up his fork once more, Will concentrate on his food, trying to figure out Lecter's game plan here. What good would it come of rescuing Will? What game was he playing? When no explicit ulterior motive presented itself, Will wrote a note behind his ear to go back to it when he, at some point, got back to his own apartment, with a locked door between him and one of the most notorious mob bosses in the country. Lecter, it seemed, was completely unaware of the rapidly more panicked monologue within Will's mind, as he kept a light one-sided conversation going, telling Will about the weather (it was still snowing), about the fireworks from last night (they were beautiful) and about some major news story about a moose somehow venturing into a grocery store. By the time all the food, and the most delicious coffee Will had ever tasted, was gone from his tray, a comfortable silence had settled between them.

"I shall fetch you your clothes," Lecter said, standing slowly, "and I'll have my driver drive you wherever you wish."

With those words he left the room, and Will still seated in the bed, a confused headache beginning to throb in his temples. Only a couple of minutes later, Lecter returned with his clothes, folded precisely in his arms, and informed him that the driver would be waiting outside the room when Will was ready, before, once more, leaving Will behind.

It wasn't until Will was seated in the back seat of a beautiful black Bentley that he realized he'd forgotten to thank Lecter for his hospitality - something he was sure had his father turning in his grave.

"Oh well," Will muttered to himself, "if all goes to the plan, I'm sure there will be a next time."

Chapter End Notes

Come talk to me at Tumblr, or come play with me (and a bunch of other awesome people) in Fandom Hell.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

I'm not dead people.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The contrast of Lecter's nicely decorated and warm home and Will's own little apartment filled with second hand furniture was jarring enough to leave Will with a sour taste on his tongue. The old panel oven in his apartment had an ever going array of mood swings, but Will still had hope as he turned it on, despite the metallic screeching sound it made. Whatever heat he had gained from Lecter's home had shriveled up and died by the time the driver had dropped him off, and Will could once more feel his body shake and teeth rattle. Walking into the kitchen, he couldn't help but be glad that no one from the bureau could see him now, crunched over and moving as if he was 80, wanting nothing more than to make a cup of tea and crawl into bed.

The thoughts on Lecter's actions were running through his head in a loop, and Will considered everything from Lecter knowing he was FBI and that by saving Will's sorry ass he could get himself a in with the bureau, to the idea that Lecter had somehow, despite all the best of their knowledge, found a shred of humanity in him and taken pity on a stranger freezing in the snow. Flinching at the sound of the kettle whistling, Will bussyed himself by preparing his tea, before going to bed - hoping that the oven would somehow perform a miracle and manage to heat up his apartment this century.

Whatever Lecter's motivations had been, Will knew one thing for sure, and that was that he now owed his life - whatever that was worth - to the head of the lithuanian mob.

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Days turned into weeks, and weeks turned into months, and by the time that March arrived Will's situation started getting desperate. He hadn't seen or heard anything more from Lecter, or even some low-life dealer in his crew. The first couple of days he took it in ease, figuring that Lecter was probably just taking his time, that one couldn't rush these kinds of things. By

the second week he started getting antsy. By the first month, the anxiety started giving way to the apathy, and even though he recognized the symptoms, Will was unable to stop the downward spiral his mind had jumped on. He could see how Tina and Diana worried about him, could hear how their whispers had turned away from his ass and towards his solemn mood, but even the idea of forcing a smile on his face seemed like too much effort.

Who had he been kidding anyway? A kid like him trying to be the one to take down the most famous mobster in the modern day? How anyone could have looked at him, at his scrawny body and weak-willed mind and think that yes, this is the one who will save us from the monsters. Maybe they hadn't thought that at all. Maybe Jack Crawford had been completely aware that by sending Will on this mission, on this suicide mission, he was simply ridding himself of a sacrificial lamb? Was he expecting Will to make it through, to survive the final months of his mission intact and in one piece, or was he simply waiting his time to see Lecter's reaction? Was Will simply a science project, a way to gain a way into Lecter's mind by seeing what sorts of torture and ills he would inflict on Will?

Well, fuck Jack Crawford anyway. His mistake had been underestimating Lecter's involvement, or possibly overestimating Will's appeal, because Hannibal Lecter had taken one look at William Graham and decided that he wasn't interested.

On a slow Tuesday night, three months and four days after his impromptu visit at Lecter's house, something finally happened, though looking back on it, Will would think that of all the things that could happen, this was perhaps the last thing he needed.

With no more than five patrons visiting the archangel that night, Tina had given Diana the night off, chasing the youngster out the door with a huff, telling her to stop wasting her youth in a place where the time stood still and go out dancing for the night instead. When she tried to give Will the same message, he simply raised an eyebrow at her. She laughed at him, and the sound was so unstrained, so natural, that Will couldn't keep himself from smiling back at her.

They worked in silence through the night, so deep into routines that there wasn't any need for words between them, and the only sounds of the archangel was the live band covering some soft blues songs, and the occasional murmur of the patrons. In any other setting it would have been chilling, the silence oppressing, but that night it seemed so natural, and it took Will's brain a second too long to notice when everything went still around him.

The sound of a gunshot was deafening, echoing through the room and bouncing between the walls.

Through all his training at the academy, Will had never gotten accustomed to firearms, and whereas his fellow students cheered with joy every time they were permitted to the range, Will prefered the quiet of the library and the still air filled with the scent of old books. It had been a hail mary that he even passed his training; his skills with knives and hand-to-hand combat far surpassing his accuracy with a gun, despite both being below the average of his class.

“Will!”

Someone was whisper-shouting his name.

“Will! Berniukas!”

Tina. Tina was whispering his name.

Another gunshot exploded through the room, and it felt like someone had electrocuted him. His training kicked in, and he slowly made his way towards the bar, trying to keep his head down, thanking whatever deity was listening that he’d been serving one of the back tables. The two middle aged men he’d been serving had thrown themselves underneath the table at the first sign of troubles, and a small part of him wondered how his instincts weren’t as tuned. Hadn’t he been trained for this exact situation? He couldn’t see the shooter, didn’t even dare look across the room, and when he finally crawled behind the bar it felt like hours had passed.

Tina had her back pressed firmly to the bar, her phone already in her hand, fingers moving rapidly across the screen. She gave him a quick once-over before gesturing for him to settle next to her and returning her attention to the screen in her hands. In some distant part of his brain, the small part not currently busy fighting his fight or flight instinct, he marvelled at how calm she was - though after spending weeks and months and nearly even a year in her company, he had learned to recognize the slight downwards turn of her mouth as the danger signal it was.

“I am going to slit his throat-” Her whispered threats were deafened by the loud bang of another gunshot, making them both jump, and by the time Will’s ears stopped ringing he was sure he had lost at least half her sentence, “look at my bar! Supista pyzda shooting up my bar! I’m gonna rip his head off!”

The shelves behind him were digging into his back, and Will felt a hysterical laugh bubbling up his throat. Stifling it as best as he could, he tried to focus on Tina’s muttering beside him, the words a strange bastard mixture between english and lithuanian, not unlike the way she got the time a stag party had refused to take no as an answer when Diana was serving them.

Another gunshot went off and a bullet hit the wall in front of them, and Will couldn’t stop feeling like he should be doing *something* , he was a cop after all, and he couldn’t just sit by as innocent people could get hurt. His attention was stolen by the feeling of Tina shifting closer to him, pressing herself against his side, putting her arm around his shoulders.

“Don’t worry, kid, it’ll all be over soon,” she whispered in his ear.

“Did you call the cops?” Will asked.

“The cops - heh, he might like to hear you call him officer, but no.”

“Wha-”

Tina’s phone started vibrating in her hand, and they both jumped at the sensation, Will’s words dying on his tongue. With quick fingers Tina had the phone unlocked, and her face split into a wide grin that made a chill run down Will’s spine.

“The cavalry's here, kid,” she whispered, kissing the side of his head, “I told you everything would be fine.”

Before Will could ask her if she’d lost her mind, he could hear a loud crashing sound, followed by a pained groan and the heavy thump of a body hitting the ground. Will wasn’t

sure if minutes or hours had passed by the time he heard five sets of footsteps - three heavier ones most likely working boots, and two lighter ones, strangely enough, high heels - making their way through the bar. Part of him, the cop part, wanted to stand up and look, but the other part of him, the terrified 22 year old, wanted to just stay put. Before he could make up his mind, Tina gripped his hand, shaking her head at him.

Will wasn't sure if he leaned more heavily into the bar behind him from relief, or from frustration.

He wasn't sure how long they stayed like that, shoulders pressed tightly together, Tina's hand gripping his, before a woman's voice called Tina's name.

"Come out, come out, wherever you are," the woman called.

Whoever the woman was, Tina clearly knew her, and before Will could understand what was happening, she stood up and turned to face the newcomers, dragging Will with her.

"Margot!" Tina called, spreading her arms widely, grinning, "I knew you would come to my rescue."

The woman, Margot, simply tsked. Dressed smartly in a pressed white suit and black high heels, and her dark hair pulled into a tight bun at the top of her head, the sound should have been patronising, but there was a slight upcurl of her lips and warmth in her eyes as she looked at Tina.

"You're losing your grip, Tina," Margot said, moving towards them slowly, "unable to take out your own trash?"

Will tuned them out at Tina's outraged squeak, letting his eyes roam the room to take in the damage done. The shooter had gotten four rounds off, and unless they had been a terrible shot, they had taken great care not to hit anyone. The closest they'd come had been the shot to the wall next to the bar where Will and Tina had been hiding. The table his patrons had used as cover was still overturned, the only sign that the two men had been there at all, and the rest of the bar looked untouched. Walking out from behind the bar counter and further

into the room, Will took note of the two bullet holes lodged in the wall behind the VIP-area, and squinting his eyes, he was almost certain he could see a bullet hole in one of the chairs there as well.

A slight movement in his peripheral vision reminded him that he wasn't alone. Turning slowly he took in the other people in the room, two bored looking men talking quietly to each other by the door as they stood over the prone form of a man Will assumed to be the shooter, both dressed all in black, with black combat boots. Turning away from them and towards the back of the room, and the bar where Tina was still talking with Margot, his eyes caught on the impeccable Alana Bloom standing silently with another darkly dressed man, and he could feel his eyes widening.

Alana was dressed in the same manner as Margot, though she'd opted for a dark green suit that matched the necklace draped around her throat, and her slightly curled hair was hanging freely. Will couldn't help but notice how her eyes were currently glued to Margot, and he wasn't sure if he imagined the warmth and admiration in them or not.

Walking slowly back to Tina, it seemed as the conversation between the two women was wrapping up, and by the time he'd made it back behind the counter, Tina draped herself over him with a lazy stretch.

"You did okay, kid," she said, squeezing him tightly, "but now it's time for you to go home."

The steel in her voice left him with no option, and Will wasn't even sure if he had the fight it would require in him, so he simply nodded his head, and turned to walk through the door.

--

The mood at the Archangel was high the next day, and it seemed like the entire community wanted to stop by to celebrate their survival throughout the day. Will was sure he hadn't held a conversation with over two thirds of the people who wanted to pat his back and buy him a drink, but he was glad for the busyness the crowd created when the soccer mom table turned up wanting to shower him with praise for his courage, and cries over how worried they had been over him. At least all the constant running meant that they couldn't grab his ass the usual amount, and that in itself was a small mercy.

By the time the doors closed behind the last, still celebrating, patrons, Will draped himself over the counter with a dramatic sigh.

"Cheer up, buttercup," Diana said from where she was perched on the end of the counter, "it's tip time!"

"I can barely feel my legs and I'm not sure if that's a good thing or not," Will answered.

"Hah! Be happy about that now, because tomorrow you'll be feeling it," Diana said.

Will simply tuned her out, groaning silently to himself as exhaustion was making his body heavy. At least they could hope for a decent amount of tips tonight.

The sound of the tip jar dragging across the counter seemed to loud in the quiet of the bar, and Will blinked his eyes open, not entirely sure when he'd closed them, to watch Diana root through their winnings with a quiet sense of amusement.

The amusement turned to ice in his veins when she pulled up a note with a curious sound.

"For you, Berniukas," was all she said as she stretched across the counter to hand it to him.

"Please tell me you're not jealous of the vaikas, Diana," Tina said with clear amusement as she walked up to them.

Will listened to their bickering with half an ear as he opened the note.

"You really should take better care. In the future, I will care for you, and eviscerate anyone who dares try to cause harm. You are more precious than you realize. - H.L."

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much to Dena for the help with Hanni's note! <3

Come yell at me in Hell.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

PLEASE READ THIS:

!This chapter contains descriptive child abuse, but physical and emotional!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The realization struck Will like lightning when he walked through his apartment door that night. The second he closed the door behind him he could feel his shoulders drop and the tension leaving his muscles, his head hanging heavily from his shoulders. He felt safe. The irony of it all made him laugh out loud. As a child the idea of safety seemed further away than the moon, and by the time he'd left his father behind and started creating a life for himself with the FBI, safety hadn't seemed like it was even a possibility. The mere idea of loosening his guard amongst the other candidates at the academy was absurd, the taunting words and thinly veiled threats removing all possibility, and even the little apartment he'd gotten after he'd graduated had never seemed like more than a resting place. But here, in a thin-walled apartment on a mission to infiltrate the lithuanian mob, fully knowing that the only possible ending to this was his death, *here* he felt safe. This was the place that seemed like home.

--

Laying in his bed that night, Will held the note over his face, looking at the words as if they would somehow rearrange themselves and show him another meaning. Whoever H.L. was, what had started off as friendly, if slightly strange, commentary on Will's days at the club, this new development was something Will wasn't sure what he felt about. It was one thing joking about soccer moms with wandering hands, but another completely to indicate a future relationship. Will thought about how he would handle this new development as he drifted off to sleep.

--

"I know where you are, boy!" His father’s voice boomed, and it was too close, why was he so close? "D'ya think you could hide from me?"

Footsteps were heavy on the floor, and Will could feel himself curling up tighter, clutching his knees to his chest, pressing his eyes closed. His dad was coming closer, Will could hear him moving about, could hear the sound of his ragged breathing as it closed in on the cupboard where Will was hiding. The sound of something heavy getting dragged across the floor and then thrown into the wall with a loud bang made him flinch, but Will didn't dare move to cover his ears.

"Come out here and take your punishment like a man, boy!"

Will wanted to cry, but crying would mean making sounds, and then his dad would find him, and Will didn't want it to hurt.

"I'm warning you!"

The footsteps were coming closer, and Will tried to stop his shaking.

Between one heartbeat and another the cupboard door was wretched open, and Will cried out as harsh hands grabbed him, dragging him out onto the floor. A sharp pain shot out from his hip like lightning, and Will bit his lip to keep it from shaking, looking up at his father’s face through his tears.

"'m sorry, daddy," Will cried, "I'm sorry."

His father’s face was twisted with rage, and his hands were merciless where they grabbed onto Will's skin, nails piercing the skin, before he was thrown against the table. He tried curling in on himself again, but he knew that it wouldn't work, that the perceived weakness would only infuriate his father more.

"Please, daddy, please," Will begged, hating himself for sobbing the words out, hating the knowledge that it wouldn't work.

His father’s footsteps were coming towards him again, but before before his hands could impact on Will's body, the sound stilled - and suddenly Will found himself standing in a corner. He looked at his father in surprise, but the perspective was all wrong - his father was no longer taller than him, instead of having to crane his neck backwards to look at his father's face, he could now look the older man in the eye. Looking down at himself he saw he was wearing the black pants and vest he wore as his uniform at the Archangel, his body once more grown into adulthood. Looking back at his father in surprise, Will couldn't help but jerk at the *thing* that was now standing behind the other man.

It was walking on two legs, a humanoid creature black as night, but with antlers rising towards the ceiling. The creature tilted it's head to the side as it reviewed him, and Will couldn't suppress the shiver going down his spine. He couldn't place it's face, but the more he looked at it the more he felt like he knew it, and Will suddenly had the urge to hide his face in the creature's chest.

Standing frozen in the corner, Will noted how the creatures lips twisted up with a slight smirk, before it wrapped its hands around Marcus Graham's neck. Will couldn't do anything more than stand there and watch as it choked the life out of his father. The creatures eyes never left Will's.

"He shouldn't have tried to do you harm," The sound of it's voice sounded so familiar. A faint picture started forming in his mind. A memory of warm hands.

The sound of a gunshot rang through the house, and Will woke with a gasp.

Clutching a hand to his chest, Will tried to ignore the way it shook, and how his breathing rasped through his lungs. There was another loud bang, and Will realized that the sound was coming from right outside his window, and he desperately tried to calm his racing heart. His legs were tangled in his sheets, and as he struggled to get free three more bangs ran through the air, and by the time he finally got free, his ears were ringing. The floor was freezing underneath his feet, and his body felt like he’d taken a beating as he slowly moved towards the window. By the time he managed to get his shoulder leaned against the wall, he could hear laughing, and with a small frown of confusion he leaned to the side, catching a glimpse of what was happening outside.

Three teenagers, or, he guessed they were teenagers, were standing in a semicircle, watching as a small string of firecrackers sparked between them. When they started cracking, the kids

all laughed, and Will felt like he could finally get enough air into his lungs. Firecrackers. Shaking his head, Will turned his back on the scene, and walked back towards his bed. Stripping his sheets from the bed he resolutely ignored how they were drenched in sweat - he was fine, it was just all the stress of the past couple of days taking their toll on him.

By the time he'd stripped the bed his heartbeat had finally settled within the normal range, but the idea of going back to sleep made chills run down his spine. A quick peek at his watch told him that while it was still early, at least Irma would have opened her store. Grabbing a quick shower and pulling on some clothes, Will left the apartment quietly, trying not to curse or winche with each step. Diana hadn't been kidding - he really did feel it in his legs.

The cool March air did more to wake him up than any coffee ever could have, and while the streets were quiet, there were the occasional person out despite the early hour, and Will was surprised to notice how many of them smiled at him, or even offered a small greeting as they passed. By the time he reached the small corner store, Will was quite certain that he'd never received that many sincere smiles before. At least not unless there was alcohol involved. Pulling the store door open, Will managed to get three steps inside, before the shouting started.

Moving inside with more caution than before, he listened to Irma - there really were no mistaking her voice, even when it was raised in a pitch loud enough to be heard across state lines - berate some poor soul. Will couldn't understand what she was shouting, the lithuanian too quick for him to catch, but her tone was promising death and destruction. Walking towards the sound of her shouting, Will could feel his body tensing, and he wasn't sure if he was preparing to save the poor soul facing her wrath, or jump out of the way and towards safety if the need arouse.

Walking around a shelf containing baking supplies, he could feel his heart freeze when he got a full picture of the scene.

Irma was standing with her feet planted firmly into the floor, hands on her hips, and a look of pure rage on her aging face. Her grey hair was covered by a shawl, and another, bigger, knitted version was draped over her hunched shoulders. Standing barely three feet away from her was Hannibal Lecter, with a patient look on his face. The mobster was dressed in a long, dark woolen coat, dark checkered suit pants, and black leather shoes matching the leather gloves covering his hands. His back was straight, and his legs a hips width apart, and despite the posture, he looked completely content to stand there, getting his ass - figuratively - chewed off by a woman barely reaching his sternum.

Will wasn't sure what drove him to make a sound - probably the crystal clear image of Hannibal Lecter pulling a gun to Irma's face and pulling the trigger - but when the pair turned to look at him, he immediately regretted it.

Irma's reaction was immediate, her face clearing of any anger, and she hurried towards him with open arms and a wide smile on her face.

"Mano brangusis berniukas," she cried, "I have been so worried for you!"

By the time Will's brain unfroze, she had dragged him into a bone crushing hug, muttering into his chest in some bastard mixture of english and lithuanian.

"And there was šis žmogus, kuris nušovė visus and I did not know if you had been hurt and this šunsnukis wouldn't tell me anything as if I'm *nothing* -"

Hands hovering over her back, Will shot a desperate look around him, swallowing hard when his eyes met Lecters.

"I'm fine, Irma-" the name prompted a sharp pinch to his side, " *senelė.* "

The foreign word felt strange on his tongue, but the pleased look on Irma's face made it worth it, and as she finally released him, it seemed that Lecter was done being ignored.

A quick sentence in Lithuanian to Irma - which was promptly responded to with a glare and a muttered answer - and the old woman walked away, leaving the two men to fend for themselves.

"William," Lecter said, "I'm glad to see you in good health,"

“Mr. Lecter,” Will gave the other man a strained smile, nodding slightly, “I forgot to thank you for your hospitality and help, so,” dragging his hand through his hair to stall time, Will tried to figure out how to handle this, “thank you,”

Should he try to find an in now? Try to find something, anything, to wedge himself into Lecter's organisation? Would it even be possible, or should he just give up?

“Ah, how kind of you to remember,” Lecter said, dragging Will out of his thoughts, “but it was no trouble at all,”

Will nodded, and gave the other man a final smile, before starting to walk deeper into the store. He could almost feel Jack Crawford standing over his shoulder, screaming into his ear about missing his shot, but the mere idea of trying to entangle himself into Lecter’s circle after the past couple of days was giving him a headache. When he noticed Lecter following him, and eventually falling into step with him, chills ran down his spine.

“I heard there was a shooting at your job the other day,”

The words were said in a causal tone, but Will couldn’t help but sneak a suspicious look towards the mobster, wondering where he was getting at.

“There was.”

“No one got injured, I hope?”

“No.”

“I’m glad to hear it,” Lecter said, and Will got the sudden feeling that despite his face not showing it, the man was smiling.

Will ground his teeth at the tone, quickening his pace he grabbed a bag of sugar, moving towards the teas, trying desperately to ignore the man walking beside him.

Lecter hadn’t tried starting a conversation again, but he followed Will throughout the entire store as Will collected his groceries. He was standing close enough for Irma to start shooting him glares when they got to the register - and Will realized that he would have to change his mental image, because he was now sure that no matter how big of a threat Lecter was, Irma would be the last one standing between the two of them - and by the time they reached the door, Lecter held it open like a proper gentleman.

Huffing out a quick thank you, Will noted the black SUV now parked right outside the store. Lecter only smiled, gave him a quick nod, and started walking towards the car. He stopped right before his hand hit the door handle, turning towards Will once more, and a chill went up Will’s spine.

“You really should take better care, William,” Lecter said, and Will felt the blood drain from his face at the words, “the world is full of dangerous people after all.”

Chapter End Notes

Ya'll are getting spoiled with two updates during the SAME YEAR oh my god.

Also, I have read every single one of your comments and they are so amazing and I love them and you. I don't usually answer comments, but if you want an answer, let me know and I'll make sure to do it!

(Also, I don't answer because I like keeping them as unread to look back through them whenever I need a pick-me-up, not because I don't appreciate them!)

Translations for Irma's rant courtesy of Google Translate:

Mano brangusis berniukas - My darling boy

And there was šis žmogus, kuris nušovė visus and I did not know if you had been hurt and this šunsnukis wouldn’t tell me anything as if I’m nothing - And there was this man who was shooting everyone and I did not know if you had been hurt and this bastard wouldn't tell me anything as if I'm nothing

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

> So. I'm not dead. I know it's been a while *cough* but, well. Have an extra long chapter to make up for it?
>
> And also, to all of you who have kept commenting on this fic despite it appearing to be abandoned? I love you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Staring after the SUV as it drove away, Will could feel a fog settle around in his brain, and his body grew heavy. Thoughts kept racing, bickering with each other for his attention. He closed his eyes and drew a weary hand over his face. Lecter might simply have been making conversation, he could be going completely off character and show a tinge of concern for his fellow human being, this didn't need to mean anything. A voice in his head sounding painfully like his father crackled, whispering cruelly about how Will was always so good at hiding his head in the sand. A shiver ran down his spine.

H.L.

Hannibal Lecter.

His body seemed to be working on auto-pilot, falling back on the most basics of tasks, putting one foot in front of the other.

Waving back to the single mother who lived two doors down from him.

One foot in front of the other.

Breathe.

Should he call Jack? Call of the entire operation, crawl back into the safety of the bureau's labyrinth walls?

One foot in front of the other.

Keep breathing.

--

It became his new mantra, keep breathing, keep moving, keep doing anything and everything in his power to shove the thoughts away. He knew that it wasn't healthy, he could see the way Dalia kept looking at him when she thought he was occupied - he could hear them whisper to each other, words like depression and hurt and trauma as if they were somehow entitled to weigh in on his life.

The days seemed to move with a gliacure pace, and somehow within the blink of an eye at the same time. There were no more notes to disrupt his routine, no more words from Hann-, no, no thinking about that. His voice seemed to shrivel up, words going unused, and his smiles somehow felt forced on his face.

--

"Will, come on, you have to eat something," Dalia said, poking her fingers into his ribs, "you don't have much to take from, you know."

He tried to hide his wince, smiling crookedly.

"I'm coming," he said, "just gotta finish the inventory up real quick."

Dalia looked at him through narrowed eyes, her face closing off, and despite himself, Will couldn't help but categorize her body language. He knew it wouldn't be much longer now,

her patience wearing thin from his continued apathy, and he wanted to curl up on the floor. He knew this wasn't right, that something was wrong, but for the life of him he just couldn't figure it out. Or, well, he didn't want to figure it out.

The only choice stood between betraying *H.L* , who had gone out of his way to make Will smile, and who had left him words of encouragement that had embedded themselves in Will's heart, or, calling Jack, letting him know that Will had an inn with Lecter, that he could see a path to manipulate him, a way to get the job done.

"Will!" Dalia called his name sharply, snapping her fingers in front of his face, "Jėzau, ar tu net girdi mane ten? Will, are you in there?"

He shook his head sharply, "yeah," he said, "sorry, I just got lost in my own head for a bit there."

Dalia grabbed his upper arm in an iron grip, and started dragging him towards the backroom of the Archangel, muttering curses under her breath.

"You're gonna eat, and then you're gonna tell me exactly what's wrong," she said sternly, pushing him towards the small seating area, "and I'm going to be a good friend and help you solve your goddamn problem because I am *done* ."

Will sighed but allowed himself to be dragged towards the chair, falling heavily onto it when Dalia gave him a small push. He watched her stomp around the backroom, moving from the fridge to the bench with angry movements, muttering underneath her breath about how good of a friend she was and how even good friends had limits. When she whirled around towards him with a butcher knife in one hand and a plate in the other, Will couldn't help the full body flinch, raising his arms slowly with his palms out.

"-and another thing! If you would actually take better care of yourself and I don't know, maybe *eat* , and perhaps get some sleep, your problem wouldn't be the size of the mount everest!" She ranted, waving both arms around her. "And we are friends! I am a good friend, and you are so lucky that I am this good of a friend because if I wasn't I would have ignored this, this, this freaking apathy and whatnot you've got going on, but *no* , I'm a good friend," she kept walking towards him, and Will felt himself glued to the chair, "and if you want to go

on with your life living it like some ghost then go ahead, but give me some warning first, because I will support you, but I *need to know these decisions* !"

With those final words she slammed the plate, that had by some miracle and years of waitering experience, survived the waving onto the table. On it was a simple cheese sandwich.

"Do you want me to cut it or not?" she asked calmly.

"No, thank you?" Will said meekly, staring at the knife.

"Okay. Okay. Now, I am going to get my own food, and we're gonna sit and you're gonna talk. Got it?" Dalia said, turning back towards the kitchenette.

"Okay," Will said, and obediently started picking at his sandwich.

Less than a minute later they were sitting opposite each other, eating their sandwiches, just sharing a minute of silence.

"So come on, what's going on?" Dalia asked softly.

"I found out who kept leaving me those notes," Will said, surprising himself, "and I have absolutely no idea what to do about any of it."

"About what?"

"About the notes. About him, or me, or any of this," Will said quickly, "about the fact that the person who kept leaving me little notes to cheer me up during those hell like shifts is a fucking *mobster* !" By the time he finished his sentence he realised that he'd raised his voice, but it was like saying the words out loud had broken a dam inside his head, "I don't know

what to do about the fact that I thought I had a friend, someone out there who actually gave two shits, but it turns out that he's -"

"He is what?"

"He isn't. He can't be."

Dalia narrowed her eyes at him. Took a deep breath in and let it out slowly.

"First of all," she said, voice dangerously calm, " you have a friend. You have two friends, at the very least, who give a hundred *shits* about you. And second of all, why on earth would that matter? He is who he is, that doesn't mean that you can't like the notes he's leaving, or care about him, or, god forbid, that he cares about you. He's leaving you some notes, not fucking proposing to you!"

"Dalia, you know that isn't what I meant," Will said, shoulders dropping, "I know I have friends in you and Tina, and I mean, I'm fairly sure Tommy doesn't outright hate me? But this was something else. I don't know."

Dalia scoffed, keeping her face carefully blank for another minute before the mask dropped, "I know, I know. But Will, this doesn't have to change anything if you don't want it to. Or, maybe he'll actually start signing his name now?"

A loud banging sound drew both their attention towards the door, though it didn't take long for a somewhat muffled "I'm okay!" to filter through.

"Looks like Tommy's here for his shift," Dalia said, "and for what it's worth? I don't think he doesn't outright hate you either."

Will looked down at his now empty plate with a small smile.

--

It became easier after that, with Dalia's somewhat unintentional permission to just let things be. He didn't have to feel pulled between the two choices anymore, because she had added a third option that he hadn't even known to be a possibility: don't let this change anything.

He hadn't really realized how low his mood had become, or how many people had started to take notice, until later that night when he was clearing up table 6 after their regular soccer moms had left, when he saw the tip left behind and one of the moms, *"call me Claire,"* , had given him a wink and mentioned how good it was to see him happy again as she left. Will found that he even didn't mind the pinches to his ass that much - at least not today.

Dalia kept checking in with him throughout the day, poking and prodding at him, and as much as Will appreciated it, he knew it wouldn't be a quick-fix. The epiphany that he didn't have to make a definitive choice helped shake some of the fog away from his mind, but it still couldn't remove it all, and he hadn't, couldn't, tell her about his assignment. His real job. His real life. In the back of his mind Will could hear his father crackling. He kept moving, checking in with his tables, wiping them down after people left, taking orders when they arrived, trading jokes with his regulars.

Even Tommy seemed to be in a good mood today, trademark smirk in place.

At the age of 46 Tommy was the oldest of them working at the Archangel, and as a married dad of two he saw his shifts at the club as a getaway from his family. He often joked with their regulars about the lunacy of getting married and having kids, but at the end of the day he would always be up for talking about them as if they hung the moon. He was a stern man, with close cropped black hair, icy blue eyes and a strong jaw, and he reminded Will too much about his father for comfort. It hadn't helped that Tommy had taken one look at him and asked Tina, loudly, if she could refrain from putting them on the same shift without anyone else there.

But today Tommy seemed to be in a good mood, and when they passed each other by the bar, he even gave Will a small nod.

“Good to see you’re looking better, kid,” he said, before grabbing the drinks Tina put out for him, and disappearing back towards his tables.

“I told you he didn’t hate you,” Tina said, “now shake that booty of yours over to table 7, they’re waiting for their drinks.”

Will bowed dramatically towards her, picked up the drinks, and got back to work.

By closing time, Will was too exhausted to worry about anything. The evening hours had been excruciating; a party of thirty five guys around Will’s age had spilled through the doors for a birthday afterparty, all pumped up energy and loud voices. For all that Will loved the club, he really couldn’t see why they’d chosen it, as it clearly wasn’t to enjoy the soft music playing.

They were all dragging their feet during the cleanup, and even the usually cheerful Dalia was looking tired and worn, and Will couldn’t help the sigh of relief when he could lean on the bar for the tip count.

“I’m absolutely using my share to get myself a massage,” Dalia said, arching her back to make it pop, “and no one is allowed to shatter my illusion that it’s gonna be enough to cover it, because that’s all that’s keeping me standing right now.”

Tommy, who now looked about ready to commit murder, simply grunted, and Tina snickered as she counted up the tip.

“As long as it keeps you standing, you can keep your dream, and the ten dollars and five cents for your tip, as well,” Tina said, reaching across the bar to hand them each their fair share, “despite the extra mileage today seems to have put on us all it’s not much.”

Will knew there wouldn’t be a note, not tonight, but the absence of it still left him with a pang of sadness. Taking the money without a word, he looked up and caught a glimpse of the sympathetic smile Tina sent his way. He quickly looked away.

When the last of the lights were off and the final inventory was done, Will quickly changed out of his uniform and into his usual worn jeans and hoodie, already dreading the relatively short walk home. He contemplated simply sleeping in the backroom when Dalia called after him, asking if he wanted company for the walk, and he started dragging his feet towards the entrance.

When they walked out the door however, they were met with a heavy rainstorm hitting them straight in the face.

“Am I the only one seriously considering going back inside and just camping in the back room?” Will asked, looking at Dalia with a grimace on his face. Even half sheltered by the roof the wind was still blowing the rain into their faces harshly, cutting through Will’s clothes like knives.

“No,” Dalia answered, “But Mr.Meow will start contemplating my assasination if I don’t get home and give him his midnight feast soon.”

Despite the rain and the cold, Will couldn’t help but look at her incredulously.

“Mr.Meow?” he asked.

“I’m fostering,” Dalia said, “and right now I have a senior bastard living in my home. He meows nonstop, and he didn’t have a name, so why not?” She shrugged, smiling at him crookedly, “You should consider it. It’s nice to have the company, when he doesn’t bite me, that is.”

Will just shook his head - ignoring the pang of longing at her suggestion, but knowing all the same that he didn’t have the means, let alone the time, to offer an animal - and offered her his arm. As soon as he felt her hand curl around his elbow he put his head down and started walking. It didn’t take more than a minute for him to be soaked through to the bone.

They didn’t speak as they walked, both huddling into the other in a desperate attempt to starve off the wind and rain, and when they came to the street corner where they usually parted - Will going to the left, and Dalia going straight forward - they both simply continued

forward, both too accustomed to Will walking her home after their evening shifts. He knew she could take care of herself, a fact she had proven again and again at the club when a customer became overly familiar or the bouncer took too long to arrive if someone got rowdy, but the thought of having her walk alone at night set his teeth on edge - a fact that had been jokingly attributed to his southern upbringing.

Twenty minutes after leaving the Archangel, they stopped in front of Dalia's building, an older block complex with a worn exterior and a busted lock on the main door, and she carefully released his arm with a pained grimace.

"Ach," she said sourly, "my entire body is completely frozen. I'm a block of ice now, and I can't get my massage because you can't massage a block of ice."

Will tried to smile, but the clattering of his teeth made it nearly impossible. "G-g-g-go up and thaw yourself out, and maybe your cat will massage you," he stuttered, locking his arms across his torso, hiding his hands in his armpits.

"Do you want to come up? I have enough hot water for both of us to shower, and there is room for you to sleep over if you want?" she offered, as she stood there with one hand on the door, shivering.

Will simply shook his head, "no, but thank you for the offer. I'll see you tomorrow, right?" he asked.

"As long as none of us die of hypothermia, sure. But text me when you get home, okay?"

"Of course."

"Good night, Will."

"Good night."

Bracing himself for the fifteen minute walk home, Will turned and started walking. The rain still hadn't let up, and for a moment he hysterically wondered if he was developing gills. It seemed like the rain was picking up for each step he took, hitting his face like needles, plastering his hair to his face.

The cold was making him move slower than usual, and it took him just over twenty minutes to get home, and by the time he stood in front of his apartment door his hands were shaking hard enough for him to drop the keys twice. When he finally managed to open the door and get inside, he worked with a single minded focus on getting his wet clothes off, leaving them as they fell on the floor, on his path towards the shower. The first hit of the warm water hitting him had him hissing through his teeth, backing quickly away from the ray and towards the wall. Gingerly he first let his hands break through the water, clenching them into fists when the heat scorched him, until he could just barely stand letting the rest of his body follow. He stood underneath it for what felt like half an eternity before he reached for the shampoo. Vigorously rubbing it though his hair he cursed rain and coldness and spring, all in one breath, before dunking his head underneath the showerhead.

Getting out of the shower took all the remaining willpower he had, and he braced himself for the shock of the cold as soon as he opened the showerstall, but even so, goosebumps still ran across his skin at the first hit of the cold air. He quickly rubbed himself dry with a towel, and made haste towards the tiny bedroom, stopping by his discarded hoodie to pick up his phone from the pocket.

When he finally crawled between the sheets, he pulled the duvet over his head, curling up in a fetal position. He flipped open his phone, and noticed a new message, but figuring that he could read it after he'd texted Dalia, who would no doubt be pissed tomorrow if he forgot to let her know he'd made it home safely, he left it.

Exhaustion was weighing heavily on his limbs, and as soon as he sent the message to Dalia, letting her know that he'd arrived home safely, if somewhat frozen, and once again confirming that they'd meet tomorrow for an early lunch before their shifts, he could feel his eyes dropping. Figuring that the mystery text could wait until the morning, Will didn't fight it as sleep took over his body.

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The next morning he woke slowly, as if his body was resisting the entire process, to discover that he was somehow unable to breathe through his nose. An attempt to swallow led to a small whimper escaping him, as what felt like barbed wires tightened around his throat. His entire body was aching, and his head felt stuffed with cotton. A cold.

Will was sure that somewhere down in hell, his father was laughing.

Forcing himself to sit upright made the throbbing headache that had been lying in wait show itself by full force. Rubbing at his temples he forced his legs out of the bed and to the floor, grabbing hold of the nightstand with his one free hand for balance, and stood. The room instantly started spinning. Knowing that it wouldn't get any better by sitting back down, Will stood his ground, and waited for the worst of it to pass. He then gingerly made his way to the bathroom to relieve himself, washed his hands, and almost wept when he discovered that the medicine cabinet behind the mirror was completely empty.

He walked back to the bedroom slowly, telling himself that he'd sleep for just one more hour before getting up, getting dressed, and go to Irma's store to buy aspirin.

When sitting back down on the bed didn't cause his head to explode, he took out his phone to text Dalia to cancel lunch, and Tina, to inform her that he might not be able to come in for his shift. It didn't take more than half a minute before his phone vibrated in his hand, and the reply from Tina came brightly across the screen.

< Do not even consider bringing that plague to my club. Dalia called in sick too. Feel better soon, will check in with you later. x

A small knot of worry formed in his stomach, and he hoped that Dalia wasn't too sick, and then he wondered about how Tina was going to handle having them both out for the count. She'd have to ask Tommy to work a double, and then do the same herself, and even then it would be murder if the club got busy.

> I can come in, just need some aspirin

< I'm not kidding, kid. Stay at home, stay hydrated, and sleep. x

The guilt soured his stomach, and Will vowed to himself that he'd see at noon if she didn't change her mind. Maybe he could just stay behind the bar? He sat an alarm on his phone for 11PM, hoping that catching another three hours of sleep would end up being the miracle cure he desperately needed, and carefully laid back down.

Sleep took him within seconds.

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It was one of those times where Will knew he was dreaming. Everything was rose tinted and softwashed, and as he laid in his bed there seemed to be an abundance of sunlight filtering in through the windows, and the smell of summer green grass and lavender traveled on the air. As he laid there all the pains in his body was gone, and he knew that there would be no more of it. A soft humming came from his right, and when he turned his head towards it he saw her.

His mother.

Her dark curly hair hung loosely over her shoulders, and her warm blue eyes looked down on him with so much love, so much affection, that it almost hurt looking at them. Her skin was light, the same fair color as his own, and as he looked at her, he could feel her hand brushing through his hair.

"My darling little boy," she said, "mon loulou, I miss you so much."

"Mom?"

She was there, really there, sitting by his bedside, stroking his hair. She winked at him, and continued humming softly under her breath, fingers continuing their unhurried pace around his curls.

“I wish I could have been there, my darling boy,” she said, “I wish I could have held you and sheltered you and taken you far, far away.” She looked so sad, her eyes downcast, a frown tugging at her lips. “I always wanted a boy, you know? A handsome little one, just like you, and I wanted so badly to give you everything you deserved.”

A tear trickled down her cheek, and Will wanted to reach for her; to hug her and hold her tight, promise her that all had been forgiven, tell her that he wished for the same. That all he wanted as a child was to have her with him - that every night he would pray for God to allow her to visit him from heaven. He wanted to tell her not to cry, that he didn’t deserve any of her tears, that he didn’t want them. But he couldn’t move his arms.

“I’m sorry, mom,” he whispered, “‘m so sorry.”

“No, no, mon cher,” cupping his cheek in her palm, she bent close and rested her forehead to his, “you have *nothing* to apologize for, if I could have had the choice to do it over again, I would have. Always. I love you, William, so so much.” She kissed his nose, and his cheeks, and his eyelids, and Will could feel her tears land on his face.

“I love you, mon loulou.”

Will knew he was dreaming. He knew the dream was about to end, he could see the darkness close in on them in his peripheral vision, yet he didn’t want to accept it.

“I love you too, mama,” he whispered, “I love you.”

Just before he woke up, the last thought that entered his dream world, was how much he really wished he could have hugged his mom.

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When he woke up he could feel the wetness on his cheeks. For a split second he had the strange notion that it must have been real, that his mother really had to have been there, if her

tears were still on his cheeks, but when he blinked a fresh stream of tears fell from his eyes. The clash of reality was strong enough to leave him winded, and he didn't know how long he laid there, looking at the roof of his bedroom - the one that wasn't lit by an abundance of sunlight and the smell of fresh grass and lavender - before his phone vibrated.

He ignored the first three vibrations, thinking that Dalia must have finally be conscious enough to text him back, but when the fourth vibration rang he realized it was ringing.

He almost didn't answer it.

Almost.

Picking up the phone he could feel his heart do a leap when he caught the name on the screen.

Chester Cambell.

He scrambled to make his uncooperative limbs work, flipping the phone open and pressing it to his ear.

"Mr.-" Will croaked, and had to painfully clear his throat before he could try again, "Mr.Cambell."

"Will!" Jack Crawford shouted through the phone, "You've been there for 6 months, tell me you got something," the man growled into the phone, making Will wince as he rubbed at his throbbing temples.

Will had a singular moment of crystal clear panic.

What was he going to say? Yes sir, I've met Lecter twice, and almost threw up on his shoes the first time. But don't worry, sir, I've been receiving notes from him for months now -

though it was only recently that I realized that it was in fact him. Oh, and he did save me from what could very well been the worst unintentional suicide attempt on the planet, or maybe that was just me being an drunken idiot? Oh, and yes sir, of course, I did get to taste some of his cooking and it sure was delicious.

If he said any of that Jack would have him pulled from the case and sent directly into a padded cell before he even finished his sentence. If he said any of that it might very well mean having to leave the life he had slowly, painstakingly, built here over the past months. Leaving his friends. The two people *who gave hundreds of shits about him* .

“Things have been quiet, sir,” Will said, wincing at how rough his voice sounded, “I’ve only met Ms.Bloom and Ms.Mason, and that was only to serve their drinks.”

The silence from the other end of the line was taut with tension, and Will could feel his body tensing in preparation for the hit, could feel his heart trying to beat its way through his chest.

“Are you telling me that you’ve been there for six months, *six months* , and you haven’t managed to produce anything more than five minutes as a fucking busboy?” Jack asked, his voice dangerously calm, “And what, pray tell, have you been doing with your wasted time, huh? Sleeping your way through the days, serving drinks to a bunch of bums during the night?”

“I-” Will tried, but Jack cut him off before he could get anything else out.

“When I agreed to take you on, I did it despite everyone else telling me that you were too green, too soft to make it, because I thought I saw something in you worth while! Are you trying to set me up to look like a fool? Do you somehow operate under the impression that I sent you there for a vacation?” He roared, and Will could hear blood rushing through his ears, “This operation is already on overtime, and the only thing we needed from you, the only job you have, is to find Lecter and tie him to anything, get him for anything! You’re there to find an in into his circle, not to work as some glorified waiter!”

“Sir, I’ve been trying,” Will rushed out, “I am trying, I really am, but Lecter seems to have gone underground,”

“TRYING? You’ve been *trying* have you? I expected more from you agent Graham, and you *will* deliver, or so help me God I will make sure you never see the other side of your desk until you fucking retire!”

Will could almost perfectly see Jack Crawford in front of him now. How he would tower over him, arms raised, eyes wide with fury. How the vein in his forehead would throb with every puncture of his words.

If Will stretched his imagination just an inch, he could see Jack beating his fists into his skin to punctuate them too.

“You’re halfway done with your time, agent Graham, do better. Be better.”

Will wasn’t sure if he answered or not, and through the ringing of ears he could barely hear the final beeping tone of Jack hanging up.

“Do better, be better.” Jack shouted in his head.

“You *will* be better than that, boy,” his father thundered, “you think this is acceptable?”

His entire body was pulled taut, tension washing through his muscles like water - he needed to move. He had to get out of there, away from the angry shouting, away from the threat of angry fists and harsh beatings.

He was barely aware of throwing clothes on, body moving on auto-pilot throughout the familiar rituals, keys, wallet, shoes. He was outside within minutes, adrenaline driving him forwards on unsteady legs. He couldn’t feel his fingers.

One foot in front of the other.

Keep moving.

Find safety. Hide. Don't let them find you.

"You can't hide from me forever, boy!"

Move.

One foot in front of the other.

--

"Saldainiukas, kas nutiko žemėje? Ar tu sužeistas?" Irma's voice shone through the others, and Will turned to look at her worried face. She was wearing a soft looking purple shawl over her shoulders today.

"I'm sorry, what?" Will asked, willing his mind to focus on her.

"What happened? Are you hurt?" she asked, "do you need a doctor? Oh, come inside, foolish boy, look at you, no jacket in this cold!"

Will stumbled after her, focused all his attention on her retreating back. She was safe, he was safe here. Even the ghost of his father wouldn't dare come across her, the tiny dragon who had willingly put herself in the path of the likes of Hannibal Lecter. It was okay. Everything would be okay. Breathe.

Irma kept throwing worried looks back towards him as she walked through the door of her shop, between the shelves, and then to the almost hidden door behind the register. When she opened it and gestured for him to go inside, he hesitated for a second too long, and she tsked at him loudly.

“Inside, kvailas berniukas, quickly now,” she said, gesturing once more, “you need to get some warmth in your body.”

Walking through the door he wasn’t quite sure what he was expecting; perhaps a storage room filled with wares to re-equip the shelves. Instead it was a warmly decorated sitting room, with walls draped with red velvet curtains, and heavy wooden furniture softened by pillows and blankets. In one corner of the room there was a small kitchenette station, barely more than a miniature refrigerator and a bench with a kettle and a small assembly of different teas. The room felt warm and lived in, and in one of the chairs there was a small bundle of knitted fabric attached to a circular needle, but Will couldn’t make heads or tails of what it was supposed to be. Irma quickly guided him towards the empty chair, and fretted over him as he sat down with a heavy sigh. When she put her hand on his forehead she hissed, and shrieked at him in rapid lithuanian, before turning to leave the room. Just before she closed the door behind her she turned back to look at him sternly, raising one hand with her finger pointed towards him.

“Stay,” she ordered, “I will fetch medicine, for your fever.”

Will could feel his body relaxing into the pillows underneath him, muscles that had just seconds ago been tensed in preparations for fight or flight protesting the strain, his head throbbing in beat with his heart. He felt like he’d been hit by an 18wheeler, and then dragged for miles and miles. Leaning his head backwards carefully until it hit the chair, he let his eyes close. God, he was tired.

He must have dozed off, because when the door opened once more he startled awake, staring towards Irma who came towards him looking as if she was armed for a war. He spotted the green bottle in her arms and couldn’t help his grimace.

“You will drink it, and not make face like a child. It is for your own good, foolish boy, walking outside with no coat on,” she said sternly, before putting her spoils on the table beside him. She twisted off the cork on the nyquil bottle and measured up a very careful cork full of it, holding it out towards him, “it will help with the fever, and your head.”

“That’s NyQuil,” Will croaked out, “I can’t take that now, it’ll have me flat out. It’s meant for the night.”

“Pah! It is medicine, you take it, and it will help you get better. It will make you sleep, sleep will make you better,” Irma answered, stepping closer towards him with the cup, “Don’t worry, I have called for help. They will arrive soon and take you home.”

Will wondered how on earth Tina could possibly find the time to come fetch him and help him home, but maybe the club was going slowly today, and Tommy could handle it for an hour.

Looking at Irma he realized he really didn’t have any choice in the matter. One way or the other, he was taking the medicine - and maybe it was the cowardly way, but Will decided to take it voluntarily, instead of suffering her forcing it down his throat.

The salty tang of black licorice, and the thick syrupy texture coated his tongue, and Will immediately regretted his decision. Irma quickly handed him a glass topped with ice cold water to help wash the flavor away, and it felt heavenly going down his sore throat.

“Thank you,” he said quietly.

He wondered when last time someone had actually taken the time to fetch him medicine had been. He couldn’t remember it, but surely someone had, in the past? All children got sick, after all, so surely someone had once made sure he’d gotten the medicine he needed, someone had cared enough?

Irma simply smiled at him and patted his cheek with her warm hand, before stroking once over his curls.

“I will keep watch, don’t worry,” she said with a soft smile.

She walked slowly back towards her own chair, picking up her knitting before sitting down with a weary sigh. The lulling rhythm of the needles clicking together was the only sound between them for a long while. He watched as her fingers quickly moved through the stiches, and when she lifted it up to give it a careful once over, he saw that she was knitting a baby sweater. The yarn was dyed in a soft yellow, and looked so soft to touch. Will smiled. Whoever the child was, they would be loved.

He dosed for a bit, lulled by the soothing rhythm.

It wasn't until he heard a bell ring on the other side of the door that he considered that she'd left the store unattended, and he found himself wondering if this was something she did often, sit in her comfortable room, knitting soft things for little children, waiting for the bell to ring and announce someone's presence. He gave himself a mental shake when he saw her standing up, and with careful movements he mimicked her, though he had to clutch at the back of the chair to make sure his legs would hold him. He wasn't sure what she saw in his face when she turned towards him, no doubt intending to scold him into sitting again, but her eyes softened and she simply smiled before turning to leave the room. She left the door open behind her.

He could hear her greet someone in lithuanian, and heard a male voice answer. The voice was too soft for him to make out from this distance, but Will swore there was something familiar about it. Moving slowly he started to walk across the room towards the door, hoping to be able to make out why that voice was so familiar.

It took more than he'd like to admit to be able to get to the door, and he had to stop and grasp the handle to re-find his balance and catch his breath before he could walk through it.

Their voices were clear now. Irma's worried tones mixing with - wait, was that Lecter? Will stopped in his tracks and listened more carefully. Yes, that was Hannibal Lecter's voice mixing with Irma's. Moving with more determination now, Will finally rounded the first shelving unit and laid eyes on them.

The scene played out almost like a case of deja vu, except this time Irma's hands weren't planted on her hips, but crossed over her chest. Lecter, however, still stood in the same careful manner. Legs a hip length apart. Back straight. Arms held carefully behind his back. And that exact same patient look on his face. Except Will didn't have to make a sound this time for them to notice him, it was as if they could feel his eyes on them, and they turned towards him almost simultaneously.

"William," Lecter greeted him.

“Mr.Lecter,” Will returned.

Irma shot a short sentence in rapid lithuanian towards Lecter and waited to receive a careful nod, before turning towards him with a small smile, “Mr.Lecter has offered to drive you home, Saldainiukas,” she said, walking towards him, “and you will let him, and you will sleep. Sleep is the best medicine, yes?”

Will felt a heavy led ball drop into his stomach at the thought.

“I wouldn’t want to put Mr.Lecter out,” he tried weakly, “I’m perfectly capable of walking. It’s only a couple of blocks-” his words were interrupted by a horrid coughing fit dragging itself from the pit of his lungs, putting both his chest and his throat on fire.

By the time it stopped, Lecter had walked towards him with long steps, grabbing hold of his arm, keeping him on his legs.

“Nonsense, it’s no trouble at all,” Lecter said, and he was standing too close, warmth radiating off him like a furnace, “I can’t let you walk on your own in a condition like this.”

Will wanted to protest, but the ghost of Jack’s voice in his ear screamed about finding a way in, about doing better, and he was so tired, and Lecter was so warm and sure beside him. He nodded his consent, and gave a quiet thank you, which Lecter gracefully accepted with a small nod.

“Irma can collect your jacket, and whatever medicine you’ll need,” he said, bringing Will closer to his side, dropping his arm to grasp him around his waist instead. When Will tried to reach for his wallet to pay for the medicine Lecter tsked at him.

“I can pay for the medicine,” Will said stubbornly, “and I don’t have a jacket.” He tried to reach for his wallet again but his arm was unwilling to cooperate properly. Turning his head towards Lecter, Will just caught a glimpse of the frown on his face before it was smoothed out again.

“I see,” was all that Lecter said.

It didn’t take more than half a minute for Irma to return with a small plastic container filled with all sorts of medicines. Will could barely make out the dreaded nyquil, as well as a bottle of dayquil, and several different boxes. Before he could even consider trying to make his arms reach out to grab it, Lecter had taken it in his free hand, and Irma had turned towards him with warm hands and muttered well wishes. With a promise from Will to return as soon as he was feeling better, and a very short conversation with Lecter in lithuanian, she released him, and stepped aside to let them leave.

Lecter somehow managed to get them both out of the store and to his car in one piece, despite Will’s legs somehow deciding that they were done cooperating, and a heavy drowsiness settling in over his mind. Will knew that they had walked like this before, on New Years Eve, when Lecter had saved his life, but he couldn’t remember. In the smallest, most sacred part of his mind, he hoped he would remember this time. Lecter was sure and strong beside him, easily keeping Will’s shorter body close with his own, and he was warm, so very very warm.

It took him a second to realize that the quiet whine came from him, when Lecter untangled them and leaned him towards the cold car so he could open the passenger door for Will, but he couldn’t help it. It was like his body had gotten the taste of warmth and now, when he had moved away, everything else was cold enough to bite. Lecter shushed him softly when he helped him into the car, and helped him get his seat belt on. A warm hand landed high on his shoulder, almost to the point where it met his neck, for a brief moment before the door was closed. Half a minute later and Lecter got into the car himself and started it.

“William, I need you to listen to me carefully,” Lecter said, looking at him, “can you do that for me?”

Will nodded slowly, mesmerised by the way the light played in Lecter’s eyes, turning them from brown to black to brown again.

“I can either take you home to your apartment, or, if you’d like, I can take you back to my home.”

“-ome,” Will muttered, blinking slowly, “wanna go home.”

“Very well,” Lecter said.

The drive took fifteen minutes, as opposed to walking, which usually only took six. Will couldn’t quite explain why, but for some reason it seemed exceedingly important that he shared this information with Lecter.

“And why would that be, William?” Lecter asked, and Will got caught up in the way he looked so softly amused.

“‘s cause of the shortcuts,” he answered, trying to stifle a yawn against his hand.

Lecter simply hmmed at that. But that was okay.

Will had turned his head towards him to part with this grand information, but now, his attention drifted in tact with the heaviness of his eyes, and the idle thought of how warm Lecter was crossed his mind. And despite the heater being on, Will was still so cold, and his head was feeling so heavy. It didn’t take much conscious thought to simply let his body tilt towards Lecter, leaning his head on the older man's shoulder. He nuzzled the fabric of his coat, humming softly as the warmth and the smell of Lecters cologne surrounded his senses.

“What are you doing, William?” Lecter asked softly.

“You smell nice,” Will replied sleepily, “‘nd my name is Will.”

If Lecter replied, Will didn’t catch it, as sleep finally took a hold.

Chapter End Notes

Lithuanian translations are thanks to Google so if anything is wrong, please let me know and I'll change it:

Jėzau, ar tu net girdi mane ten? : Jesus, can you even hear me in there?

mon loulou (French) : My little one

kvailas berniukas : Foolish boy

P.S. Oh, and by the way; I have never before encountered NyQuil and thus all the information I have to go on is google.

P.P.S. Sorry for the cliffhanger, but I am working on the next chapter already so?

As always, do come rant at me at Tumblr where I'm also open to questions about this fic.

End Notes

Find me at Tumblr (prompts open) and/or come play with me in Hell. Comments and kudos activate my praise kink.

"Berniukas" - Boy
"Saldainiukas" - Sweetie/Honey

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!